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AN ARTIST'S PROOF.

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SEASON: A SATIRE,' ETC. ETC.

' Nil nequeat nobis dignam Dis degere vitam.'—LUCRETIVS.

' Nought e'er need balk us of a godlike life.'—AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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PREFACE.



LIFE, when narrated by History, is, and when represented by Fiction should be, the result of the combined action of character and circumstance.

Impressed with this truth, which reconciles two unnecessarily conflicting historical methods, I have endeavoured to bring defined characters face-to-face with perplexing circumstances, and from them to evolve a natural but absorbing story.

But it appears to me that those characters in History, which are at once the most interesting and the most important, are precisely those which begin by contending against, then for a time seem to succumb to, but invariably end by co-operating with, their Age. These are the central figures.

Allowing, I trust, proportionate room to my

minor personages, I too have my central figure ;
and he lives in the nineteenth century.

This latter fact, annexed to the foregoing theory,
will already suggest to many, what I trust the story
itself will explain to all, the reason why I have
entitled it '*An Artist's Proof.*'

AN ARTIST'S PROOF.

CHAPTER VII.

It was but too true. Mortimer had arrived to find De Saintfront prostrate and speechless. There was no immediate danger, however. Beyond this, the doctor would, as yet, pledge himself to nothing. To-morrow, he would like to have the opinion of a colleague. One came. The two held long conversation. Even after it, they were disinclined to be communicative. The attack, however, must have a name. The word must be spoken—it was unquestionably paralysis.

In their predictions of the absence of ground for any immediate alarm, a few days proved them to be correct. But locomotion was seriously, and probably for ever, to that extent impeded, and speech was considerably affected. This much was too

plain to make it worth while to try to conceal it from poor Marian. To Mortimer, at last, the medical men made a complete avowal of their anticipations. De Saintfront would never again be much better than he was now at the expiration of a fortnight from the occurrence of the stroke. It was sure to be repeated : when, they could not say. If not till after a considerable interval, the second stroke might no more be immediately fatal than this first. The same would hold good of any successive ones. It all amounted to this : he might be carried off soon, and he might yet live a very considerable time. Yes ; a few years. On the whole, probabilities were in favour of the latter. To Marian, Mortimer contented himself with confiding the most hopeful portion of their statement.

As for himself, the event was a deathblow to the early fulfilment of his Italian projects. Come what might, he must remain, as long as De Saintfront clung to life, where he was. He could not go now. His second paper was accepted, and a third was promised every consideration when it arrived ; but these could no longer be regarded as helps to speed him beyond the Alps. If they were of use

in contributing trivial little mitigations to his poor old friend's melancholy state, that for the present would be their use and justification. His time, too, was of course largely trespassed on. But how could he niggardly refuse it, or so much as permit it to be seen, by the crippled father at least, that it was trespassed on at all? Here, if ever, was a case in which the Divine injunction, 'Bear ye one another's burthens,' came with an imperative directness that could not be evaded. Had not the courtly soldier and his simple daughter largely co-operated in lightening the weight of his? The question needed very little argument, indeed none at all. Mortimer felt that he *must* remain at the post of pity: he could not pass by. It would be sheer brutality to leave Caen, as matters stood now.

De Saintfront still possessed all his mental faculties intact in kind, though of course shackled in degree. Probably the imperfection under which they now laboured, arose more from the physical difficulty of giving them vent, than from any intrinsic deterioration in the faculties themselves. The more Mortimer reflected upon the conversa-

tion which he had held with the sufferer on the evening preceding the very night of the attack, and the excitement of which he grieved to think had much to do with inducing it, the more and more astonished he grew at the reflective, reproductive, and dialectical capacity which the conversation had displayed. It was quite evident that, if the eloquent Frenchman had not previously manifested his remarkable powers, it was not so much his own fault as Mortimer's. As I believe I have long since said, but am quite sure is true, he was the least vain Frenchman in His Majesty's dominions. We may be quite certain that any other Frenchman equally gifted was loudly proclaiming himself in the then free press or tribune of his country. There is an abundance of cynical Frenchmen ; but it is very rarely that a Frenchman is too cynical to care for applause. Now, though a cynic, at best, is only half a wise man, De Saintfront's cynicism was, at least, too sincere to be anything but quiet. And just as, by virtue of his cynicism, he, in common with smaller cynics, imprisoned one half of his understanding, so, by virtue of his honest intensity, he, unlike them, reduced the other half to consis-

tent torpor. It would no more have occurred to him to seek to air his opinions before Mortimer, than before Monsieur le Président du Corps Législatif. For him no such temptation existed. Unlike most people, who talk not because they have got anything to say, but because they have got nothing to do and nothing to think about, he had spent most of his time in thinking, but saw no reason why, because he thought, the world or even his immediate neighbours should be troubled with his reflections. Had he lived in what he could have considered a growing and constructive age, instead of in one which, as we have seen, he regarded as a destructive and dissolving one, he would probably have continued to lend the original ardour of his mind to the wholesome process of social evolution. But convinced as he had become that modern society was marching straight and inevitably to its tomb, he was not sufficient of a pedant to publish schemes, now impossible of realization, which might otherwise have saved it. I do not at all adopt his views—I only explain them; and, explaining them, I confess I see their justification. And being such as they were, he was singular if you like, but con-

sistent in his singularity, in keeping them to himself, till an opportune provocation arose for their assertion.

Such he had found when Mortimer had avowed the intention of devoting himself for the future to the attainment of a lofty ideal in literature. The notion of stemming the full current of an Age which was bent on self-destruction, was too wild and visionary a scheme for De Saintfront to entertain; but it was surely not too late to save an individual. And hence the ideas which most other men, had they possessed such, would have addressed to the world in an octavo volume, he addressed to Mortimer in a few ringing sentences. The catastrophe which had so swiftly followed upon their delivery, still more forcibly impressed them upon Mortimer's mind. Driven to turn them over and over during the ensuing fortnight in which, though much with the invalid, the latter was of necessity compelled to preserve comparative silence, he could not avoid feeling that there was much which was plausible, if not conclusive, in the views which so strongly militated against his own scheme of life. Still we are seldom, if ever, driven out of our course by mere argument-

ation, and in practice are bad to convince by any experience other than our own. It would have taken a great many fine theories to make Mortimer lay down his pen. If he really be ill-employed, inflexible Heaven will in its own good time probably knock it out of his hand.

But it was strange to see how, as soon as the injunction of extreme quiet was removed by the doctors, De Saintfront displayed the most restless and almost feverish anxiety to recur to the subject of Mortimer's occupations. That he had always been fond of the young Englishman, could easily have been detected ; and perhaps it was more the debility of his state than any really increased affection, that made him appear now to regard Mortimer with enhanced tenderness. He preferred to have Mortimer's assistance before anybody else's, even Marian's. He was fretful in Mortimer's absence, singularly excited by Mortimer's presence. This, apart from any conversation which they held together. But whenever he could, he worked the conversation back into the old groove that ran towards Art.

He could no longer express himself with rapidity ;

and sometimes when he had been talking for any length of time, he grew if not inarticulate, at least difficult to follow. And the very fidgetiness and anxiety to get all said which accompanied his discourse, made him, poor fellow, under the circumstances, occasionally painful to listen to. Still Mortimer could gather, from what he said, that he was perfectly cognizant of all that had been uttered on the occasion before his attack, and now only wished to guard himself against misconception, or to make supplementary suggestions by which his views might be corroborated and enforced. Not with any ambition of completing a theory, but of snatching Mortimer back from the jaws of a voracious mistake.

Most of all, Mortimer must not think, he said, that his argument told against liberty. Due subordination was not only quite compatible with liberty, but true and lasting liberty was impossible without it. Art was itself the visible result of subordination, conjoined with co-ordination, just as there also resulted from them a proper public sovereignty compatible with abundant individual freedom. When he had said that Art and the principle of sacrifice which

regulated its well-being, were quite independent of any *form* of government, he did not mean that any *species* of government would permit of their existence. Indeed a material despotism would probably annihilate both, since it usually destroyed that co-operative liberty and encouraged that individual licence, the first of which was so necessarily included in, the second so necessarily excluded from, the principle of sacrifice. Historically, it had always done so. It did so in Greece, with the triumph of Alexander. It did so in Rome, with the establishment of the Cæsars, allowing some recurring glow of the old fire as it relaxed its grasp a moment under the Antonines. Similar political occurrences accompanied by similar phenomena in Art, were to be seen in Italian, French, and English history. But the real coincidence and dependence resided in the simpler and larger law which he had stated; liberty being rather an incidental but invariable phenomenon associated with Art, than a cause of it.

Why, let Mortimer look at the very licence of the so-called Artists of the time in the very choice of their subjects! They seemed to think

that anything and everything was a fit subject for artistic treatment: completely forgetting that the essence of Art lies in rejection, not in comprehension. Herein was to be seen the essential difference between Art and Science. Science wants to know: Science wants *all* the facts. Art does not want to know, save so far as knowledge subserves its end—*viz.* itself. Science investigates, collects, and classifies. Art assimilates, and utterly neglects and ignores what it cannot assimilate. Limitation is the very bliss of Art.

Now unfortunately, in this Age, an intelligent individual—and from such alone could Art ever proceed—cannot possibly help being, in his knowledge, more or less scientific. He is encumbered with detail, with which he must do something. Intelligent as he is, in a scientific Age he cannot for his life prevent himself from thinking more or less scientifically. Now Art is not mere expression: it is expressed Thought. But it is necessarily expressed artistic Thought, not expressed scientific Thought. And though scientific Thought may be given an artistic or something like an artistic expression, the result is certainly not Art. A may-

pole, though covered from top to bottom with leaves, is not a tree. Anybody well acquainted with the latter, can see at a glance that the leaves did not grow *there*. Similarly, wings do not grow upon ladies' bonnets, though any deft milliner can put feathers on the tops of them. Modern parlance would call her a great artist. By all means let us retain the expression, and so apply it. We do not want it anywhere else: for assuredly we have lost the substance.

But of all subjects preferred by modern craftsmen, those were especially chosen which seem capable of proving something. The man who asked what 'Paradise Lost' proved, was not so singular in modern times as seems usually supposed. The pet subjects for the treatment of Art (he spoke both of literature and painting, he said) were in France those which give a colour to extravagant Bohemianism, and in England those which deify domestic or pathetic respectability. Now Art was supremely indifferent to both; and of course to everything but itself. It was its own beginning and end. It was no partizan, and could not be made to subserve the purposes of partizanship. It did not concern itself

with proof, even in the modified form of probabilities. This was an arguing, dissecting, analyzing Age. Art on the contrary was believing, constructing, and synthetical. The mental peculiarities of the nineteenth century were as hostile to Art as its social arrangements. *Non ex quovis ligno fit Mercurius*. Silken purses were not made out of swine's ears. And he trusted to Heaven that Mortimer would not attempt to weave delicate work from such coarse material as this century placed at his disposal.

Poor fellow ! It was beautiful, even if sad, to see how keen was his anxiety that Mortimer should be convinced. He knew, he said, not only the pain but the demoralization which almost inevitably accompanied the dissipation of intellectual dreams. Full half the monsters the world had seen were but unhappy Lucifers, fallen angels who had once been Sons of the Morning. The next step after the discovery of having believed wrongly, was usually that of believing nothing at all : and that was surely terrible. He did not want Mortimer to join with him in thinking meanly of the times : but let him not think over-highly of them. Least of all,

let him think of them as Art-producing. Or he would surely live to rue his baseless superstition.

What a pity, Mortimer thought, that De Saint-front had not more concerned himself with educating, as it was now clear he might have educated, his own daughter Marian. Her mind was as unploughed as mind well could be. She was intelligent enough ; but she knew little or nothing, and was scarce so much as aware that the world swarmed with conflicting ideas. In fact, she appeared to have no positive side. She was the complete negation of everything that was objectionable. She had never once in gesture, speech, or dress, offended in the slightest degree Mortimer's fastidious taste. But there her apparent merits ended. Save always that her love for her father was constant and unbounded.

She and Mortimer were now more thrown together than ever. The second week in December her father had another attack, though slighter than the first ; but it compelled Mortimer to redouble his attentions, and of course redoubled the poor girl's anxiety. She could not well resist occasional depression, nor invariably repress the insurgent tears.

On such occasions it was Mortimer's office to soothe, to pet, indeed to caress her. More and more he grew into the relationship of other father, of older—much older—brother, of I scarce know what. It seemed quite natural—yet was it? He was too much occupied with other thoughts to feel it otherwise. But how felt Marian? To his manly tenderness she not only always submitted, but seemed to lean on it—to want it—but still not to court it. Indeed, a close observer might now and then have imagined that she avoided it. Still, he could not have failed to be convinced that, when it came despite of her, it was very welcome. He endeavoured to interest her in what work he could now find leisure to do, and he fancied that ordinarily he succeeded. But men are easily deceived in such matters. They mistake sympathy for interest. Over and over again have I seen women's eyes glisten with a sustained look of intelligence, whilst some clever fellow discoursed of things which they certainly did not understand, or some superficial fellow of things which nobody could understand. In both instances they liked the speaker, and so were interested in the sense or the nonsense which

he happened to talk. Mortimer talked to Marian neither foolishly nor profoundly, but just what she might readily have comprehended if she had chosen. But though she sate with evident attention, she was thinking more of the instrument than of its strain. Indeed, she was just as attentive when Mortimer was not talking, as when he was. She resembled her papa in liking to have him near, whether he was of any service or of none.

One night, just before Christmas, when Marian, accompanied by Mortimer's servant, Jeannette, was out making some forgotten purchases, and Mortimer had, by particular desire, lingered beyond his intended hour, De Saintfront, with considerable hesitation and trouble, declared himself about to get off his mind what had been on it ever since his first attack. It was not an easy thing for him to do, he said. He hoped he was doing right, though he scarcely knew. Still, where was the harm? Yes; he would speak out. He should not live long: he knew that well enough. He might die at any moment. Well! whenever the good God willed it. But there was Marian. She had been—a thousand thanks to Heaven!—such a good child:

the best of children. On his word, she had never given him a pang—a trouble—all her life. Not till now. But now she was his great, his only trouble. Would Mortimer forgive him? Mortimer was a brave, a loyal gentleman, and would understand him, he was sure. Oh, what a good child! She had been and still was the simplest of creatures, and had even told him every small event and thought that entered her little life. *Eh bien!* she had told him, before his accident—not in so many words, of course, nor on one occasion, but in an indefinite yet unmistakable way, on many occasions—she had given him to understand—no! not quite that, but—she had given him the impression—the conviction—the certainty—yes, the certainty—that her stupid little heart—how soft they all were!—was touched, was—was—. In effect, she was desperately fond of Mortimer, or he—her father—knew nothing about it.

Now, he really had no relation in the world that deserved the name, neither had she. Poor little Marian! what was to become of her? And the tears came at last. She had been so good!—so good! Could Mortimer care for her—love her—

make her his wife? If not, some convent, some good nuns, must see to her. There was nothing else for it. Was Mortimer displeased?

Mortimer went and sat by the troubled old man, took his hand, and spoke every possible word of comfort. De Saintfront knew his melancholy history, he said, and what an effect it had made, and still continued to have, upon him. He really was not deserving of the little one's love. What recompense could he make for it? Still he would own that *she*—De Saintfront knew whom he meant—did in the very last words he had of hers, urge him to marriage, if he were ever to be truly loved. Enough. He would think of it. Displeased! he was immensely grateful. De Saintfront also was loyal. What better could he have done? It would have been a shame not to speak out. Let him be at peace. Mortimer would not forget a single word that had been said. At any rate, never a hair of Marian's dear little head should be harmed. She should at least be his most sacred trust, if not his wife. That, he could not decide at once. And then, De Saintfront would be with them for a long time still. He was not going to die yet.

The old man only shook his head, and said, solemnly,

‘Yes, soon, very soon!’

Whatever face Mortimer might put upon this positive prognostication at the time of its thus being made, or on the days succeeding it, he could not in his heart but feel that it was based on extreme probability. This much, at least, was certain: De Saintfront would never be any better; Mortimer must remain near till the very worst; and whether that worst came soon or late, come it would; and he would then have to determine how to encounter the perplexity concerning the daughter, as stated by the fond old father. Would it not be well to face the matter at once, and arrive at a decision whilst there was yet time enough to save it from being over-hasty?

What then ought he to do? O wonderful Isabelle! So far all her words, when seen in the light of after-events, sounded like prophecies. She had provided in her letter against a contingency which, to him, at the time of reading it, seemed the most improbable in the world, and which (he thought) at the time of her writing it, could be only the

creation of a brain excessively careful of his future well-being. Yet here was the contingency, turned, within three months, into a calm fact, staring him steadily in the face.

Had he not better recur to the very words of the letter? He went for it. It was the only one he had ever received from her, and it had a little drawer wholly to itself. He took it out, re-opened it, and went straight to the passage at its close. There were the beautiful, calm words, just as she had written them:—

‘God has thought fit to dis sever us. His will be done. But resignation is complete only when it is prepared to act fairly by the future, as well as kindly by what is irrevocable. Therefore it is that I declare that, not only shall I be contented for you to accept whatever opportunity of domestic love and comfort the future may present to you, but I urge such upon your acceptance with all the fervour of my soul. The motives for my desiring it are founded exclusively upon your interests; but I can press it upon you with arguments founded exclusively upon mine; aware, as I am, that such will have with you infinite force. And nothing,

believe me, can ever reconcile me to my griefs, but the consciousness that you are doing something for mankind, and are moderately at peace with yourself. Literature (in some form that I cannot pretend to dictate) will procure the first, marriage the second. And I can no more doubt that you will again be loved, than that you can forward the improvement of your race. When I see both these, I will again see *you*, and you will find me happy and contented.'

That the first impulse on re-reading these sentences should not be in the direction of Marian, it would be idle to pretend. But the quiet, lofty tone which pervaded the whole letter, slowly again produced the effect which it had produced under more hostile circumstances, on its first arrival. Few letters ever act as anodynes; but this one letter in the end invariably did. The passage to which he had just referred, was the one passage from which he had withheld, and had written that he withheld, his complete consent. Neither did it convince him now. But at least it gave a *locus standi*, so to speak, to De Saintfront's suggestion, and procured for it a fair, and perhaps a favourable hearing. It did

more : it invaded the audience chamber ; it took up the cause of the applicant ; it appeared as counsel for the scheme. Was not this the very case which Isabelle had contemplated ? She said nothing in her letter about his recovering from the effects of a prior and disastrous love, and permitting his heart rejuvenescence in the atmosphere of another more auspicious. She only spoke of the future presenting him with an opportunity of domestic love and comfort. Had not the future swiftly done so, as if in very answer to her anticipation ? And if such an opportunity did arise, how was he to treat it ? She spoke of no doubts, no consideration of the past, hinted at no wound to her, not even to a willing sacrifice on her part. Not only should she be contented for him to accept it, but—but what ? ‘ *I urge such upon your acceptance with all the fervour of my soul.*’ And why ? Because she was convinced that such would promote his happiness. But she had another and (she said she knew) a stronger argument behind. It would also promote hers. Nothing but the consciousness that he was thus at peace with past and present, could give her joy in the future.

Still he refused to pronounce judgment. Superstitious almost as had grown his veneration for Isabelle's words, his habit of using his reason and submitting to its guidance was too confirmed to be wholly set aside. Would his happiness be promoted by conjugal union with Marian? And would Marian's happiness be promoted by it? Her alternative prospects held out, as far as they could be seen, so meagre a store of happiness or even comfort, that Mortimer may be pardoned, and will surely not be charged with a species of conceit too common amongst men, for arriving on the whole at the conclusion that Marian as his wife would be happier than Marian not his wife. So that the problem of his own happiness alone remained. And if ever so little probability could be shown on the affirmative side, the certainty of Marian's happiness added to such probability of his, would surely be sufficient to justify if not to compel his taking the step proposed. Especially when backed by such an influence as the words: 'I urge such upon you with all the fervour of my soul.'

What then was the probability? In replying to Isabelle, he had evaded giving any definite answer

to that portion of her letter which he was now especially considering. As he had expressed himself in his reply, he had 'given it the go-by.' But though avoiding any categorical assurance one way or the other, had he not said to himself, if not to her, that if he came to sing so that the world should harken, with that much she must be satisfied; that the other piece of counsel was out of the question; that she urged it only for the sake of his peace of mind; that she was not to be afraid; for that Art would satisfy that condition likewise?

All this he had thought, and I related it of him at the time. But that he had once thought otherwise, I also took occasion to recall. I remembered that in a summer soliloquy at Gracewood, he had arrived at the conclusion that the single life was scarce a human life, and that though man was not bound to be a demigod, he must not cease to be a mammal. Then, however, pleasant rides in Alwoodlèy had introduced a lissom figure into his diurnal dreams, and made him correct some different and thitherto-deemed philosophic conclusions. The dream was rudely dissolved; and then, forsooth, Man had better be a demigod and not a

mammal at all, and 'Art would satisfy that condition likewise.'

If Circumstance however veer slap round, what can a mortal do but partially submit, if he be not compelled to submit altogether, to the rude unobedient forces? Mortimer was now again for the fourth time transacting his accounts with Circumstance, and the old discarded views were again coming, if not into favour, at least into being tolerated. A personal, as well as an abstract, preference for the uses of marriage he had always had, and had never laid it aside save in deference to some other scheme more imperative and predominant with which it seemed to clash. Art might be long, but life was not so short after all. Forty or fifty years might still remain to him; were they to be solitary ones? He had never loved but once; and with such a love, it was no boy's fancy to suppose that he should never be able to love again. But Isabelle had gone for ever. Marian loved him; and to her he could give quite as much love as he should ever be able to give to anybody. Was she not very sweet? Was not her very simplicity perhaps the one characteristic which he now most

needed in a companion, and which would best help to bring him back some of the original freshness of life? She was not, and probably never would be, a very intellectual companion, though even of that he did not feel quite certain. Her mind had been shockingly neglected. It almost seemed as if her father had purposely eschewed cultivating it, since it was evident that he possessed in himself the means of another's culture, and the belief that women are more women in proportion as they are less embellished with knowledge, would harmonize with his other less offensive opinions. So that what Marian knew and thought, was no measure of what she might come to know and think. Intelligent unquestionably she was. In manner and sentiment she was as gracious as could possibly be desired, even by him who was once such a practical, and for all his disasters still remained such a theoretical, Sybarite. And then—she loved him. She had certainly never loved any other man. She would be giving him her first and last love—all of it, from sweet beginning to consistent close. Could he hope ever again to be so loved as it would seem that she loved him, even if he himself could ever again actively seek

for and court a woman's affection? That he should never be able to do so, he felt profoundly convinced. How much less chance was there then that he should ever again be loved as now, *without* actively seeking it! Why, this very love of Marian's had been the growth of exceedingly singular circumstance, such as was not likely to repeat itself. He saw clearly enough that no special loveliness in him, but peculiarities in his and Marian's relative positions, had provoked her affection. Was it not Heaven's last offer to him? Was it not, perhaps, a kind of pity-prompted compensation for his other untoward accident? If really such, would it not be perilous—be terrible to reject it? To love and to be loved, both spontaneously, was the best of gifts, no doubt. Then, surely, the next best gift was to be loved spontaneously, and to be able to cultivate love, or something very like it, in return. Was he not a loyal gentleman? Was he not by nature tender towards women, chivalrous and grateful? Once united to Marian, how could he then help but love her? Was it not of the very nature of conjugal love that it grew? Had he really loved—loved, in the strong sense of convic-

tion and sentiment combined—had he really loved Isabelle before his lips?—he had better not think too much of *that*. If he could not be said thoroughly to love Marian before marriage, was it not almost certain that he would thoroughly love her, after? He being such as he was, he would either love her or loathe her, depend upon it. And to suppose that he could ever loathe that sweet, bonnie, clinging child, was at once the absurdest and grossest of suppositions. What then logically followed? Nothing that as yet succeeded in convincing him. He had simply argued the question out in the manner here represented; and thus, for the present, it remained. It cannot be denied, however, that he had taken a great stride, since he had resolutely and peremptorily decided that ‘the other piece of counsel was out of the question.’

Meanwhile, De Saintfront was both better and in manifestly higher spirits. During Christmas week and the succeeding one, he had shown such a marked improvement, that Mortimer felt himself enabled, with decency, to resume almost his old attention to literary labour. Indeed, De Saintfront at last urged him to do so, expressing himself

aware of the tie which his own infirmities had been upon the other's time, and the additional obligation under which Mortimer had placed him by such generous oblivion of self.

Against this last notion Mortimer protested, but gladly availed himself of the opportunity of devoting himself to the more immediately pressing portion of his work. The higher had been almost entirely neglected of late ; but in the lower and remunerative also he was behindhand. To this he must now attend. He had not yet established himself on the staff of the magazine for which he wrote. But for the interruption which De Saintfront's illness had occasioned, he thought he might almost have arrived by this time at so desirable an arrangement. A little more patience, backed by a little more industry, would effect what, if now it did completely emancipate him and set him off through one of the snowy Swiss passes, would nevertheless place him in a position to encounter the future with that best of all defences, a sound even if small financial provision.

What we in England call Twelfth-night being, however, Marian's birth-day, upon it of course

modest festival was to be held at De Saintfront's house. Thither, towards seven o'clock, Mortimer made his way. Admitted by the servant, but as usual not accompanied by her, he passed through the little antechamber into the room where the father and daughter usually sate. He knocked, but received no answer. He entered. Urged as he had been on no account to be late, but to come in good time, he was surprised not only at not seeing anybody in the room, but at the candles not even being lighted.

It was almost perfectly dark ; and he groped his way among the furniture to where he knew was a bell, in order that he might ring for the servant. He knew the arrangement of every article so intimately, that he advanced with complete confidence, but was not a little surprised to find that, for all his intimacy, after finding the bell and ringing it, and then walking away from it, he suddenly stumbled over something, and as nearly as possible fell. He recovered himself, and stooped down in order to feel for the cause of the obstruction, and to remove it. Touch had scarcely aroused dreadful suspicions, when the arrival of the servant, lamp

in hand, forced his eyes to confirm them. Poor De Saintfront was on the floor in convulsions, the first violence of which had evidently passed away before Mortimer's arrival. Doubtless he had been sitting in the twilight, and had risen to make his slow way to his own room, when he had been stricken down by the inscrutable foe to which we give the name of epilepsy. He was alive, but the end was surely here. Epilepsy, supervening on two strokes, even if not sharp, of paralysis, would soon perform the final work of destruction. The servant shrieked loudly, and Marian, who had just completed her special toilet, came rushing in, in her adorned beauty, to swell a scene—which I leave.

A terrible, sad night was passed. The next day, about half-an-hour after noon, the brave, retiring old fellow slipped away. Four days later, he was buried. And three days again after that, Mortimer and Marian were alone. He put his arm tenderly round her neck, looked down into her swimming eyes, and quietly said,

‘You are terribly alone, and so am I. You know my past, and if you did not know it, I should think it my duty to tell it you, before I said what

I am going to say now. Fortunately, I am spared the recital. The greatest of all griefs has now overtaken you, and for a time at least I should have left you to its entire and unshared influence, were such an otherwise natural delay possible. But it is not. That must be my excuse. I am sure you will not accuse me of want of delicacy, or my words of being avoidably inopportune. I must speak now, or never. Marian, dear! will you be my wife?’

She clutched at him, and sobbed. At last she found means to say, in French, as though the language least her own was best now,

‘I have small choice. But if I had all the choice in the world, I would lay my head nowhere but here.’

And with it dropped upon his breast, her gently-fondled figure heaved convulsively.

CHAPTER VIII.

To most men, marriage is but a change: to all women it is, or ought to be, a revolution. A fair number of these, who are now supremely happy with the upturned faces at their knees, have as much as confessed to me that, in the first year of married life, they were sorely tried. They had anticipated in imagination nearly all its pleasures: they had not so much as a glimpse of its pains. The familiarity which, in other circumstances, is said to breed contempt, is the only means of metamorphosing a young wife's discomfort into an older one's more than satisfaction. The hitherto unforeseen difficulties are provided for; and feminine tact comes to the rescue, to effect what could not be wholly effected even by man's and woman's love put together.

Marian had for now so considerable a time been accustomed to Mortimer's presence, that the change

to her from being his acquaintance to being his wife, was externally less than must in ordinary cases occur. But the pain of losing for ever a parent whom she had dearly loved and devotedly tended, blended with the almost coeval joy of obtaining for ever a still nearer companion who had been the one solitary dream and wonder of her life, introduced elements so uncommon, as in reality to make the alteration in her condition most unwontedly remarkable. It would indeed have been marvellous if she had not been revolutionized by the change. Her grief for her father's death was too sincere and profound to be obliterated by any accession of happiness, however great. Nor did Mortimer attempt, when her fits of tearful retrospection were on, to stem the natural and desirable current of filial woe. Much less did he ever manifest any the slightest jealousy of a love so properly attached and paid to the departed. But when, as—thanks to the organization of our nature—was often of necessity the case, the past was for the time out of mind, Marian's joy in the present, and in the companionship of Mortimer, endued her with a sunniness which she had never manifested

of old, and which had for Mortimer an inexpressible charm. Often, in younger years, when the qualities to be cherished in women were for him but a theory, he used to assert that a woman who was not cheerful was unendurable. She ought to unite, he would say, the radiance of a summer sky with the blithe spontaneity of a vernal bird: she should sing and shine too. Now that life had become a severer and more practical matter, he was, perhaps, not so prone to indulge in theories; but for all that, whether inquisitive or not into the cause of his own feelings, certain it is that when Marian was joyous, he was positively joyous too. The only drawback to these her most agreeable moods was, that they were rarely, if ever, exchanged for sober and reposeful ones. In passing away, they were succeeded by moods that, quite independently of the grief which Mortimer fully comprehended and appreciated, seemed infected by melancholy, and—what to him was worse—by dullness. These, however, he trusted and believed, would pass away. In order to hasten their expulsion, he did everything in his power to occupy and interest her mind. In this, however, he was but indifferently successful.

The books that she was not particularly desirous to read, but which she would willingly have read to please him, were books that he did not hesitate to pronounce rubbish, and not worth reading at all. The books which he particularly wished her to read, and took every pains to provide for her, she declared she could not get through. She did not understand them, she said. Well, he would explain them;—where was there a difficulty? The difficulty lay in the entire book, not in any particular passage. Was it not that she did not take sufficient interest in them to arrive at their meaning? Perhaps it was; they did not interest her. They were stupid;—yes, stupid. O no! they were both simple and entertaining. Would she read them to please him? Yes; at least she would try. Unfortunately, she did not succeed.

What then was she to do? The greater portion of his time must be spent in mental and manual labour, to which interruptions were fatal. Three or four hours' work at a stretch was of course a matter of daily occurrence; and though it was work executed in her presence, it was work executed without her intervention, and not to be perplexed

by her or anybody's restlessness. Could Marian really have assisted him in it, he would not only have gladly welcomed the relaxation which her aid would have brought, but still more would he have hailed such proof of interest and capacity. The latter he did not at all expect; but he felt, and probably did not altogether conceal from her, his disappointment, indeed his mortification, at the absence of any proof of the former.

He was now at last rewarded by being fully recognized as on the permanent staff by the editor of the magazine to which he had first contributed, and was at liberty, and indeed expected, to send a prose paper every other month. From this source he could calculate on the receipt of at least fifty pounds a year. But success in this quarter had brought him earnest of success in another; and he was in sensible hopes of thus seeing, before long, the fifty pounds changed, by double the work, into a hundred. Had he now had but himself to think for, the Italian scheme would have seemed to be close upon fulfilment. But, besides other expenses, he had now other cares. It was not so much the additional expenditure which mar-

riage entailed, as the honest anxiety to be *certain* of what he calculated upon, with which to meet that expenditure, that bound him fast again for the present to where he was. It is sound generalship not to move farther from one's base of operations, when the enemy shows himself in front in redoubled force. The larger part of De Saintfront's income, small as it was, arose from a military pension, which terminated with his life. The remaining portion, which Marian inherited, was the produce of investment in the then new Railway Bonds, and amounted to twelve hundred francs per annum; which, when reduced to English money, dwindles to the less pretentious-sounding sum of less than fifty pounds. Still, allowing for this, marriage could not so far be said to have materially, if at all, increased Mortimer's expenditure. But it did increase materially the imperative duty of prudence and foresight, and therefore of redoubled energy and tact. If, prompted by such motives, he worked steadily and cheerfully, yet found Marian's interest in his work become at last so slight that she did not seem to care to know even so much as what he was writing about, we cannot be surprised if that

little something which by its presence would have sweetened the toil, by its very absence made the toil a trifle bitter.

Despite, however, what he could not help but occasionally feeling, he never permitted his internal disappointment to assume the guise of external accusation. On the contrary, he would excuse himself for this constant application in which she had no part, on the ground of its absolute and permanent necessity.

‘I know it is necessary,’ she would then say. ‘I know that, dear: and I know you do it all for me.’ And so on, with that loving unsatisfactory gratitude, which is a poor thing compared with that *other* gratitude which women rarely show to men save when these are injuring them. The real benefits come in too unwelcome a shape to evoke the wild thanks, with which alone woman can thoroughly repay.

But though devoting as much time as possible to remunerative labours, Mortimer still had considerable leisure for the prosecution of those finer but yet more exhausting ones which had first given a new colour, and even yet perhaps gave the

principal brightness to his life. Marriage had by no means extinguished or darkened Art. The effect, not very deep at the time, of De Saintfront's deterring words, had wholly passed away; and Mortimer had the recompense of seeing long-cherished thoughts assume proportionate, and he trusted, fitting shape, in written results whose bulk weekly and weekly grew. But for the higher and more delicate species of composition, it was not wonderful if he required absolute solitude—mental solitude in its conception, physical solitude in its execution. To these his larger and infinitely dearer thoughts, he would have joyously admitted Marian. Would to Heaven, he used to think, that she could share them with him! But any attempt to coax her within his mental sanctuary had been unavailing. She had her sweet portion of the beautiful sentiment of her sex, and could therefore have entered into any of an analogous character that had fallen to Mortimer's lot. Still she would rather have seen it expended upon her than upon paper. Nor can it be denied that in this she was gratified. In whatever artistic compositions he strove to obtain her interest, there was no display of sentiment such as ought rather to have been

bestowed upon her. These were far too thoughtful and (speaking very strictly) too moral for that, having what De Saintfront pointed out as the very essence and vice of modern attempts at Art, *viz.* a conscious and perceptible purpose. But if she found in them no grounds for personal complaint, she saw in them nothing to excite her interest. Like the books, they did not amuse her. Like the books—though she did not say so—she found them ‘stupid.’ Nor could Mortimer urge in their favour what she so readily allowed in the case of the toil performed in her presence and wrought for the sake of return absolutely needed, *viz.* that they were necessary. He could not pretend, neither could she affect to believe, that *they* were done ‘all for her.’ They were done away from her. Though ignorant of their exact financial value, he did not suppose that, on the most favourable supposition, they were ever likely to be worth much from a money point of view. He worked in Art’s service for Art’s sake, and for such remuneration as Art, thus served, has from time immemorial paid. He offered no excuse for so doing; he could offer none. He did not like to think that any was needed.

So that Mortimer's mental life which, as far as quantity of time is concerned, was of necessity much the largest portion of his existence, was spent apart. There was no help for it. Marian could not or would not spend it with him. It was quite evident that, beyond the height of regarding him as her husband whom she loved exclusively of everything on earth, she could not rise. Was she not wholly his? Had she anything apart from him? Had she any occupation, any scheme, hobby, whim, which she preferred to his society? That he should work, she could understand. Work was necessary for him, for her, for both. But that work which, though unnecessary, was so absorbing, which made him abstracted and absent, which took him from her—what was *that*?

Ah! Let no man think that his Past ever ceases to be dangerous! For all his resolutions, vile visions would obtrude themselves of one who had once said to him with her own noble lips, 'I have always thought of you, Mortimer, as something distant, and as belonging to everybody; to me only when I needed you: much, I suppose, as we regard the sky or the sunlight—very dear but very far

off, and a common possession.' Then the written words, too well known by heart, about 'doing something for mankind,' and 'forwarding the improvement of your race,' rushed upon him; and he seemed to be brought a moment face to face with a beautiful retreating dream. Then he would rise hastily, stamp his foot and knit his brow, leave desk and solitude, call out, 'Marian! Marian!' ask her if she would not have a stroll with him, kiss her and call her his darling, and have a sweet spring lane-loitering—for the moment, blessing and blest. Then the sun would set, and—'

'Now, darling! I must be off to work again.'

Most people's Past is pretty nearly as imaginary as their Future. Unable by sheer unwillingness to avail themselves of the opportunities of the Present, they create for themselves a beautiful bygone existence in which they really never lived, in order still further to deepen the dusky hues of the one in which they must live. It is due to Mortimer to say that whatever his past might have been, he not only did not endeavour to exaggerate its excellence, but he bravely strove to forget it altogether. He could not wish to banish Isabelle entirely from his

thoughts, and he had her sacred positive prohibition against doing so. But he honestly wished to reduce her as much as possible to the consistency of a shadowy dream, and to permit the intrusion of the dream only for the purposes of encouragement, never for those of indulgence. Nor when Marian once or twice introduced her name, with the evident intention of inducing him to talk of her, did he hesitate to show that he regarded its introduction as indiscreet. Marian was as little pleased at being checked in this, as he was at her giving him cause for so doing. But these indirect warnings of his objection were not of much avail when the momentary annoyance had passed away. It was all very well for him to wish to avoid certain subjects altogether, and indeed to let her see at times that fruitless investigation and analysis of personal feelings afforded, and especially between husband and wife, the very worst and most perilous of all conversations. What then was she to talk about? He did not care for her conversation. How could she say so? And then there would be petting, then a few tears, and then for a time any sort of foolish, unwise conversation that she liked.

She had more than once tried to extract from Mortimer, if her papa had said anything about her to him and what it was. He fenced as unskilfully as men invariably do when they want to conceal what they are too honest flatly to deny. But he had bantered and teased and done everything but given an answer, and was now being pressed again. Indeed, he had as much as been betrayed into avowing that something *had* passed between De Saintfront and himself about her.

‘But what was it? Tell me, Mortimer.’

‘What was it, you little inquisitive? Praise of you mostly, you may be sure; much greater than you deserved, of course.’

‘No doubt; but don’t tease me. Please tell me; I do want to know so much?’

‘But what is it you especially want to know? Have I not already told you?’

‘No; nothing. What I want to know is, did he ever tell you that I loved you?’

‘What a question! What can it matter?’

‘Yes; but it does. And I do want to know.’

‘If he did,’ answered Mortimer, laughing, and trying to be evasive by again teasing her, ‘he only

told me what I knew already, and what you had as much as told me yourself.'

'Oh!'

'Of course you did; you all do so. Do you think we poor fellows should ever have the courage to ask you for anything, if you did not give us well to understand beforehand that we should get it? *Pas si bête!*'

'Ah! you knew well enough—too well—that you had my love, though you are trying to plague me in saying that *I* told you of it. But papa did, I am sure.'

'Did he?'

'Yes; now, did he not?'

'You foolish little Marian! What, if he did?'

'Nothing. But tell me; did he not?'

'He said something to me—the most natural thing in the world. He knew I was fond of you, and you of me; and the poor, dear old fellow wanted to be comforted with the assurance that we should be united and happy after he had gone.'

'But did you ever tell him that you loved me and should marry me?'

'How could I tell him so, when I had never yet

obtained that most important point—' and he kissed her—' your consent.'

' But you knew you were sure of it ; for papa had told you so.'

' Very well. And I got it, and you too ; and have you now, and intend to keep you. Now, suppose you sing something ?'

' I will, by-and-by. But—do you think you should have asked me at all, if papa had not died, or if he had never said anything to you ?'

' How *can* you ask me such a question, Marian ? It is wicked—positively wicked. You go on putting question after question, for no possible—I will not say purpose, but at any rate—use, but that of at last perhaps getting some answer that may make you, and therefore me, less happy than we ought to be. Really, I will not answer any more.' She was going away from him. ' Now you must not be cross at what I say.' And he drew her back. ' Kiss me, now.' And she kissed him. But the sunniness had all gone, and there was no chance of more talk that night. So off he went to work again. He soon forgot the occurrence ; deeming it indeed at the time, though feeling justified in his severe

disapproval, but a natural instance of that excessive mental curiosity which, when not employed in worthier and more fruitful investigations, vents itself unwholesomely in research after what is best left undisturbed.

But he was wrong. Curiosity it was, truly enough; but it was that most dangerous, since insatiable, form of curiosity, whose hungry fangs are awake and kept awake by jealousy. If he forgot the occurrence, she did not forget it. She had learned for certain that Mortimer first knew of her love through her father. And she felt that she knew for as good as certain that pity for her solitary condition, backed by strong suggestion from her parent, conjoined, no doubt, with a certain amount of affection, but not love—not spontaneous, ardent, irrepressible love, such as she would have given worlds for it to have been—were the motives which made Mortimer unite his lot with hers. In this conviction there was material for weaving herself many a tissue of misery. It gave her plenty to think about, when—as was often the case—she had nothing else to do. It assisted her to mope more uncomfortably. Still it only invaded her melan-

choly moods. In her sunnier ones, which, though perhaps happening at greater intervals, still came upon her at times when with Mortimer, she was as charming and sweet as before.

As the year mounted into spring, and the evenings grew long and genial, Mortimer perhaps took more leisure. His passion for nature was as intense as ever ; and in his indulgence of it, he could always have his wife with him. Nothing seemed to afford him such pleasure as sunset strolls in her society. He did not talk very much during them, perhaps ; but then he had her little arm, and often, very often, her little hand in his. And she was as satisfied then even as he. But March closed in rain, and April was persistently wet ; in the evenings especially. And when they could not get out, he usually worked.

One morning, about the end of March, he received what now he very rarely received, a letter ; and what was still more unusual, he seemed so much annoyed with it, that, after a very hasty perusal, he tore it up angrily, and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

‘What is it?’ asked his wife, eagerly.

‘ Only a most offensive letter, dear. Never mind it.’

She went up to him.

‘ I am so sorry it annoys you. Whom is it from ? ’

‘ Don’t ask.’

‘ I think you might tell me, Mortimer,’ she said, reproachfully.

‘ I will, if you wish to know ; but I had rather you did not wish.’

She was very good, and kissed him, and went back to her seat cheerfully. This simple complaisance was too much for him, however. He followed her, put his arm fondly round her, and said—

‘ It is only from that—from my cousin, offering what he calls reconciliation, and—money.

‘ And you refuse both ? ’

‘ I should think so, indeed,’ he said, in a peremptory manner, that plainly showed he did not want another word to be spoken upon the subject. ‘ I suppose he imagines that I need his assistance more now. But I don’t—do I, darling ? ’

‘ Not on *my* account,’ she answered. And the subject dropped.

About three weeks later, however, Marian one evening approached her husband in her most coaxing manner, and said she had something to show him.

‘ You must not be angry. Promise.’

‘ Of course, I promise. Why should I be angry at anything you show me ?’

‘ See, then :’ and she produced a letter from her pocket. ‘ I received it this morning, and, of course, have read it. As far as I can judge, it is very kind.’

Thunder at once gathered on Mortimer’s brow. He recognized the handwriting instantly. Again, it was his cousin’s ; but this time addressed to his wife.

‘ I had much better not read it, Marian. It will only make me savage.’

‘ Oh, but you *must* read it. I should not like to feel that I have read it, without your doing so.’

‘ Very well.’ And he sat down, and was determined to be as calm as possible.

In tone, the letter was kind enough, in all conscience. Indeed, it was affectionate. It spoke of the enormous interest which the writer had taken

in Marian's husband, the interest which he could not help feeling still, and the bitter disappointment which was caused him by the breach which subsisted. Now that Mortimer was fortunate enough to be married, he did hope that the past might be wholly buried. He had written to her husband, but received no reply. He now wrote to her, trusting that she would unite her prayers with his that complete reconciliation might be brought about. He longed for nothing more than to see them both in England, to contribute liberally to their comfort, and at last to witness her husband playing a fitting part in scenes for which his great abilities qualified him. But in any way—let the choice be their own—he should be only too delighted to serve them.

Mortimer read it all through with an external calmness that he was resolved to maintain. He then quietly tore it up, and placed it where he had placed its predecessor.

‘Well?’

‘Nothing, my dear. We will suppose that you never received it.’

‘Then I am not to answer it?’

‘Of course you are not. Let us go out for a drive. We will be extravagant to-day. You know when the sun shines, I always grow prodigal.’

‘I shall be charmed, and will be ready immediately.’

The weather was again more propitious. It had been a delicious day, and the evening was sure to be long. Mortimer said they should go as far as the Château de Fontaine-Henri, distant about twelve kilometres, where he had once been on foot, but which Marian had never yet seen. They would have at least three hours’ drive. Would that be too much for her? Not at all; it would be delightful, though he was shockingly extravagant. And hand in hand, they were driven along the road that leads to the old ruin.

When they had left the city some three or four miles behind them, and there had been a silence for some little time, Marian covering his hand, which she held affectionately, with her other, said quietly but earnestly :

‘I wish so much that you would be reconciled with Mr. Dyneley.’

‘Why, darling?’

‘ Firstly, because I think it would be right to do so. That forgiveness for injuries is a duty, you know as well as I; and in ordinary circumstances would, I am sure, be the quicker of the two to forgive them. And granted that he has materially injured you—’

‘ Which I do not grant, Marian, whilst you are by my side. It is very easy for a man to want to injure another; but people have rarely if ever the power to injure anybody except themselves. We have our schemes, all of us: but we quite forget that Providence has its schemes, too, and usually of a larger character than ours: schemes to which our little ones, though not our real interests, must inevitably give place. Now I fully believe that my cousin intended to injure me, or at any rate did not care the slightest if he happened to injure me, provided he procured what he thought a benefit for himself. But I am inclined to believe that he has, by the attempt, done me much better service than he has done himself.’

‘ And does not that belief give you satisfaction? And if it does, does not that show that you have by no means forgiven him for the attempt?’

‘No, I think not. I declare I wish he were as satisfied as I am: the which I very much doubt.’

‘Probably his dissatisfaction arises from the knowledge that he has done, or tried to do, a wrong.’

‘More probably,’ said Mortimer, ‘from the discovery that the attempt to do a wrong has recoiled upon himself.’

‘Perhaps. But then you have often told me that we ought not to be inquisitive about motives, if actions are all right. Now it is plain that he is very sorry.’

‘Sorry for what, though?’

‘Sorry that things are as they are.’

‘No doubt; but on his own account, not on mine. See, Marian! Were I at the Judgment-seat to-morrow, I could not be accused of not having completely forgiven him. Could I be so passive, were it otherwise?’

‘It is very good of you,’ she said. ‘But why not be yet a degree nobler, and forgive him actively, by accepting his overtures of friendliness?’

‘Because I mistrust them. That would be rea-

son enough. But you forget that he and I are not the only people concerned. There is—Isabelle.’

‘But would *she* not wish to see you reconciled?’

‘A real reconciliation, were such possible, I believe she would desire more than anybody else. A false or shallow reconciliation she could desire no more than I.’

‘But why should you think his offer deceitful?’

‘Why should he make it? That he is *capable* of the foulest treachery, even supposing that he has repented, the past proves too plainly. Even though I pardon the past, I am justified in suspecting a repetition of foul play. And, as I said, what possible motive can he have for making these advances but some selfish one?’

‘Partly selfish, perhaps, but not wholly so. You see he wishes to forward your interests.’

‘O Marian, child! if you had gone through all that shameful time of plot and twisting, of lies by lips and lies by letter, you would understand what I feel when I hear the words “advance my interests.” He never did anything but try to use them for his own. As I say, he has probably failed. But I do not want, by a return to subserviency, to assist him

even in adding to his own miserable degradation. I forgive him too heartily for that. Were it not for the poor girl who has not, I fear, any consolation such as I have, dear, to fall back upon, I declare it would be the easiest thing in the world for me to forget him altogether.'

'I should so much like to know her.'

'Would you?' said Mortimer, a little astonished.

'Yes; before everything else.'

'Some day, perhaps, you will. If she were to ask me so far to disregard what has occurred as to know him again, I would do so.'

'For her sake?'

'Yes, dear; for her sake.'

'And you will not do it for mine?'

'*You* surely cannot ask me to do it for yours. You have no right, since you can have no motive, to ask me. The two cases are totally dissimilar.'

'Well, perhaps they are.'

'But more than that, I would not do—either for her sake, or for anybody's and everybody's sake. But there is no chance of her ever asking me to renew the blunder of accepting what he still has the insolence to call assistance, or of her proposing to

me any other humiliation ; and there is not much chance, I believe, of her asking me even to consent to what would be the extreme limit of my concession, *viz.* to renew his acquaintance.'

'What makes you think so?'

'Because I feel convinced that she knows no good could arise from it. However, if she does so, you will then have an opportunity of gratifying your special desire of knowing her ; but not before. Now let us talk of something else.'

'Just one question more.'

'Well?'

'What do you think, then, is his real motive in these letters?'

'I will tell you ; and I am not at all surprised that you do not guess it, since you do not know him. See, Marian. Poor Isabelle, we may be sure, has little joy in being tied to him. It would be idle to suppose that she ever loved him, and almost equally strange if her feeling for him, now that she knows how he deceived her, be not—nay, I scarce know what it must be. He is a man by nature vindictive ; and he probably hates her and me too, imputing to us the very state of affairs which he himself has

brought about. He hates her, I suppose, because she once loved me ; and he would be very glad to humiliate us both. I firmly believe that he merely wishes to have me in England, and under his patronage again, in order to inflict upon her the mortification of seeing how very little I care for her or her miserable situation. He would have the gratification of flaunting you and me, Marian, in her face ; and having thus chagrined *her*, he would deal with *us* later.'

' You really think so ? '

' I am sure of it. Now I have answered your question, let us leave a most disagreeable subject.'

They relapsed into silence, Mortimer by an effort transporting his thoughts elsewhere. When, a considerable time afterwards, he turned his eyes towards Marian, he saw, to his surprise, tears rolling down from hers.

' Are you crying, Marian ? What is it, pet ? '

It was nothing, of course. Then, why did she cry ? Nothing — nothing. The saying of which made the tears come faster ; quite fast now. He soothed her, but must know the reason. Really, it was nothing ; only, she wished he had never known

his cousin, or Isabelle, or anybody, but only her. She was very foolish, she knew. There ! it was all over ; and they drove peacefully homewards.

Despite the tears, which he did not like, and the (as it seemed to him) absurd reason for them, which he liked still less, Mortimer was glad, upon the whole, that the conversation about the monstrous letter had taken place. He had not shirked the subject ; he had calmly and fully argued it out with Marian, told her all the truth, as far she needed to know it, and had certainly told her nothing that could possibly hurt her. What he had said ought to assure her, and probably did assure her, that he was right in his decision, and would prove to her—if further proof were required—that he considered his future as bound up with her, and with her exclusively.

But since the hearts of even sensible women invade their heads to an extent not usually attempted by the hearts and never tolerated by the heads of sensible men, it is not wonderful that the mental operations of the former should differ considerably from those of the latter. Mortimer reflected once upon their conversation, to arrive at the conclusion that it was a most opportune and fortunate one, and

then forget all about it. Marian reflected upon it over and over again; and every time she reflected upon it, she found fresh materials for discomfort. In the first place, she was by no means dead—and the stanchest admirers of women, among whom I pray to be numbered, cannot pretend that many of them ever are dead—to material advantages. I do not mean, for herself, but for her husband and self, and for possible (indeed now, almost certain) offspring. It was quite plain to her that, unabettèd, they would have a terribly hard fight of it. She was not ambitious in any sense of the word. As we have seen, she did even enter into Mortimer's more ideal notions of greatness; and she was really too simple and good, and too little vulgar, to desire the notoriety which mere wealth can confer. But she would dearly have liked to see her way to his and her being more comfortable. She had the strong woman's appreciation of convenience. Very little would have satisfied her; indeed, it must not be for a moment supposed, that she was discontented now. But she would have liked to have lived somewhere else, and to have been somebody in no matter how quiet a circle, provided it were worthy of her hus-

band. As it was, they knew nobody ; there was nobody to know, Mortimer said, and probably that was so. If they could only live in England—in London ! She should like that ; and then he would not be forced to work so hard. As it was, if they had a family, he would have to work harder still. No ; that would be impossible : so they would have to be more and more economical. If he only would consent to his cousin's offer of friendship ! She really thought he might ; for his own sake, for her sake, for the sake of the love-pledges which she should soon give him.

But he would not : and he refused, it was clear enough, for the sake of *her* whom he had once spontaneously loved. Ah ! there was the pang, the trouble, the cause of all her restless wishes and whims and yearnings. Does it seem strange that this jealousy of Isabelle—for jealousy it unquestionably was—should manifest itself in an ardent desire to be brought across, and therefore that Mortimer should again be brought across, the very person of whom on his account she was jealous ? It can seem so only in a superficial view ; but a very slight descent into the profounder workings of human nature

will show it to be anything but strange. Certain it is that far beyond any natural and womanly wish to see her husband's fortunes ameliorated, far beyond any and every other motive, was her wish to know and see, and see habitually, Isabelle Dyneley. That Isabelle had dearly loved Mortimer, was in itself (to Marian's eyes) more than natural, and was made certain by the tremendous though useless sacrifices which she had made for him. That Mortimer had dearly loved her, was equally certain; and he had loved her when the world was for him full of choice, prompted thereto by no exceptional circumstances, by no parent—indeed, in the teeth of parents—but of his own free inclination, by virtue of love's instinctive selection. Not so had he loved her, Marian. Had he not confessed that her father had put the notion into his head, and refused to answer her when she asked him if he should have thought of marrying her but for that suggestion, and the peculiarity of her position? True, he was very good to her, the best, the dearest of husbands, and truly loved her now, no doubt; but he had loved Isabelle as he had never loved her, with fresh self-supplied affection, with a love that, if unfortunate, had

welled up from the depths of his being. So Marian argued.

Then, why want to see Isabelle? why want Mortimer to see Isabelle? Are there not thousands of wives, and of husbands too, who know perfectly well that their respective mates loved and were loved intensely by other people before ever their practical triumph came? And does such knowledge ever disturb their pillow, or even enter at all into their life? Of course not. But then they also know that the old loves are dead and buried, or are never thought of now except to be smiled over, probably to be laughed at; and so their 'rival brings them rest.' But in Marian's case, were not the facts perfectly different? Mortimer did not laugh over his old love; and much less did he ever smile at it. He would not even talk about it, and he would not have it talked about either. It was neither buried nor dead. In his heart of hearts, he must love Isabelle still, however much he repressed his love, or kept it under altogether. How could he help loving her? Was not the sacrifice which she had made for him a continuing one? Could his love then cease? •She was still suffering

out of fondness for him. Could he then—? O unhappy analysis! O unwise Marian!

But, it will be asked, if such were her conclusions, how could she possibly be so insane as to wish to bring Mortimer and Isabelle again together, and be herself a spectator of their proximity? There was no insanity. She only carried her feminine analysis one step farther. She was herself too pure and simple-minded, and had far too proud an opinion of Mortimer's honour, for the idea ever to enter her head that any or all temptations on earth would make him in ever so slight a degree unfaithful and disloyal to her, his wife. She was not at all afraid of that. It is but truth to say that any such vulgar jealousy was impossible to her. But the finer jealousy is the dangerous jealousy; and such was hers. She was jealous of the beautiful dream which, she thought, must for ever be haunting him; of the hazy but hallowed vision of once possible bliss which disaster and sacrifice must only the more have fastened upon his soul. This it was that stood between her and Mortimer. He had wanted to marry Isabelle, and had only *consented* to marry *her*. There, was the difference.

But could not this difference be annihilated? Indeed, could it not be inverted in her favour? Even supposing that Mortimer was right in his suspicion that Mr. Dyneley had the fiendish wish to wound his own wife by parading before her eyes the married love of Mortimer and Marian, would Isabelle be wounded by it? She ought not to be, Marian argued. If she loved Mortimer in the only way in which she ought to love him, and if she were truly good, she would be rejoiced to see him happy in his wife's affection. If she really proved herself so, Marian would extend to her all the affection which one woman can extend to another: Marian would love her devotedly, would do anything for her, would strive to the utmost to make her happy. On such a supposition, the endeavours were sure to be crowned with success. Each would be rendered blest by the presence of the other. Each would gain what every woman requires, and what Marian yearned for—a female friend. There would then be no ground, no room, for jealousy. Mortimer's spiritual dream would be exorcised. Hazy and supersensual love would be supplanted by sound and substantial friendship. Marian could then feel

that her husband was wholly hers, and not another's, at all, even in the dimmest way. Even supposing that Mr. Dyneley's motive was the infamous one credited by Mortimer, it would be defeated by the straightforwardness of the loyal three, and he himself be convinced that against such honourable simplicity all the guile in the world was powerless to contend. Thus finally vanquished, he might at last be content to co-operate with those whom he could not injure. This was the substance of her constant self-communings. The more she thought the question over, the more satisfied she grew that her view of it was the only right one. She put entirely out of sight what perhaps had never been strongly brought home to her—the duplicity followed by ignominy of which her husband had been made the victim. She thought only of so much of them and their consequences as caused a halo of pitiful romance to gather and linger around the girl who had been his fellow-martyr. The halo was an injury—a constant, permanent injury to herself—and a benefit to nobody. There was but one way of removing it; and that was by getting closer to its object.

Thus more and more confirmed in a jealousy which, though unquestionably regrettable and reprehensible, every delicate mind will see not to have been unnatural, and more and more confirmed in her confidence in the means by which alone it could be destroyed, she was not long in again asking Mortimer if he had not reconsidered his hasty decision. He answered drily that he had not. Would he not do so? No, he would not. He was very much surprised that she should ask him.

More self-communing was the only result of this curt refusal; and thence accrued the forcible conclusion that the only possible reason he could have for his refusal was the intensity of the love-dream, and the brightness of the illuding halo, which he cherished so intimately that he could never be induced to dissipate them. Isabelle Dyneley held him yet, if not in body, in what was infinitely worse, and what alone Marian was capable of imputing—in soul. Could nothing be done? If not, she felt she should be profoundly miserable. She would try again. She would appeal to him for Isabelle's sake: *that* might move him. A fortnight or so later she took courage.

‘If you are cross with me, I will never mention this subject again. But don’t be, Mortimer!’

‘Well, dear! what is it?’

‘Do you think poor Isabelle is very miserable?’

‘I hope not, darling; but I fear she cannot be very happy.’

‘I fear so too. Don’t you think *we* might make her happier?’

‘How?’

‘By knowing her and seeing her, and being good to her, as I am sure I should be if she would only let me.’

He kissed her fondly.

‘God bless you, Marian! I know you would. But where is the use of talking about it? How can it be? We cannot know her without knowing her husband, or seeing her clandestinely. The second, I am sure, you would not recommend; and the first is, as I have often told you, impossible.’

‘But why is it impossible? You said that you would consent to renew his acquaintance if she asked you to do so.’

‘But she has not done so, and is not likely to do so.’

‘She has a delicacy in asking, I dare say. She would rather the proposition came from you.’

‘Which it never will.’

‘But suppose I were to write to her—affectionately you know’—Mortimer opened his eyes wide—‘were to write to her and tell her that I so much wished to know her, and love her, and be good to her, and that if she wished to know us and would only write and ask you to consent, you know—that then I was sure you—’

‘Marian ! Marian ! where are you running off to ? Do you not see that this is precisely the same as though I myself were to write direct to my cousin and tell him I would accept his advances ? Now, is it not ?’

‘No ; there is a difference.’

‘So slight a difference substantially, that for any practical purpose the two things are one. It is very good and sweet of you to take compassion on a poor creature who, I fear, sorely needs it. But I am bound to say that you forget altogether my honour, my dignity, my wrongs, her wrongs—all of which, now

you are my wife, have become yours. And I should very much prefer to see you assisting me to bear what is not so easy to bear, instead of prompting me to unworthy weakness. Now I beg that we may never have any more words upon this subject. You know my mind ; and like a true wife, make it yours also.'

He had answered with decision, but certainly not unkindly. Had he spoken all that he thought, he would have spoken with much greater severity ; but much of what she had urged was so tender and womanly, that he had been at the time partially disarmed. But when afterwards he reflected upon what had passed, and was beyond the influence of her voice and the more touching portion of her arguments, he was annoyed even to trouble. At first, he had thought little or nothing of her anxiety in the matter. He had ascribed it to the influence of the subtle affectation of kindness which had pervaded his cousin's letters. By this she had no doubt been deceived and led on. But when the expression of her wishes, encountered by a firm refusal upon his part, waxed into importunity, he was irritated at what he considered a most thoughtless and wilful persistence.

And now when again, with every persuasive inducement, she urged upon him indirectly what she already knew was so distasteful to him in any form, he cast about him for some more powerful reason that could make her thus obstinate in her purpose. Ignorant of her really predominant one, he attributed her conduct almost wholly to what was certainly part of her motive, but a very small part of it indeed. She was dissatisfied, he concluded, with her social and material position, and snatched at any means which offered to ameliorate it, no matter how objectionable were those means in themselves, and no matter how offensive to him. She took no interest in his work : indeed she evidently regarded it rather as a grievance. She had no confidence in his unaided ability and energies to pull them through the breakers and rocks and shallows of life. She did not believe in him, as—Bah ! he must not—he would not think of it. He would go and have a stroll with her, and ever love her as veritably, for all her tiresome importunities, as she deserved to be loved. Only—he would upon this one great point never give way.

If Mortimer thought that he had not been unkind,

Marian thought that he had been infinitely worse than unkind. He had told her that she quite forgot all about his and Isabelle's wrongs, and that she ought, now that she was his wife, to make those wrongs her own. In point of fact then, not only was he to continue his indulgence in the detestable dis severing dream of the past, but positively she was to make it her dream too. Both, forsooth, were to worship the nimbus encircling a head which *she* thought did not need to be so particularly sacred now : 'now,' to use his own words, 'that *she* was his wife.' Alas ! Alas !

One evening, about the middle of May, she entered the sitting-room in which he seemed to be working, and without disturbing him, noiselessly sat down. She was unemployed, however, except with her thoughts, and for some time she remained quietly gazing at him. He was at his desk before the window, and his back was turned towards her. At last she noticed that she did not hear the sound of his pen ; and on moving her head on one side, she perceived that he had not got it in his hand at all ; but that before him was a newspaper. Still, though she waited some time, he did not turn it over, nor

indeed move it. He was as noiseless as herself. At length she rose, and walked over towards him. He did not move as she approached, and she saw that he was looking straight and blankly out of window. She put her hand softly upon his shoulder.

‘What are you doing, Mortimer dear!’

He jumped up suddenly.

‘Doing! nothing: absolutely nothing. I am so glad you have come.’ And he hurriedly folded up the paper, and threw it into the waste-basket.

‘Where have you been? Let us go out.’

‘By all means; but I have been here in the room for the last twenty minutes at least. Did you not hear me enter?’

‘No I did not. You are such a good little mouse: always so quiet when I am working.’

‘But you were not working. You were in a brown study.’

‘Was I? Well, I almost think I was.’

‘Is not that a newspaper from England?’

‘Yes; Bracebridge sent me two or three, which arrived this morning.’

‘Any news in them?’

‘No; not a thing.’

They had their walk ; but that night, Marian—unwise Marian !—took the paper out of the basket, and when alone, conned it diligently. She could find nothing in it to account for his unusual fit of sitting so long and so strangely idle ; but she was not going to give up the search, till every word had been devoured. At last she found a little paragraph, simply stating, that on the 10th instant, at Richmond, Surrey, Isabelle, wife of Roger Dyneley, had been safely delivered of a son and heir.

‘ Do you know,’ she said, as they retired to rest, ‘ that there was some news in that paper, that would interest you much ? Isabelle has got a son.’

‘ I saw it,’ said Mortimer, turning away.

‘ Then why did you not tell me ?’

‘ Because, my child, I think the less we talk about her, the better.’

It might be true ; but it was equally true that the less they talked about her, the more one would think and would believe that the other thought about her. It was one of those unhappy perplexities, in which neither speech nor silence can be golden.

CHAPTER IX.

THE demon of misunderstanding, when once conjured up, is with difficulty laid; and the pitiable one that stood between Mortimer and Marian was more likely to increase than to dwindle. That he had been at the moment, and continued for some time, affected by the intelligence which he had thought it better to conceal, cannot be denied, any more than that, when he had started up at touch of Marian's hand, there was upon his face an expression singular and full of mysterious pain. Whether it was shrewd observation or only unfortunate fancy, Marian noticed its recurrence on many subsequent occasions; but she had now finally desisted from her efforts to bring about the only cure for his trouble and hers which she could imagine as likely to be effective. Speaking had been worse than useless; she now would suffer silently.

But the hot, long days of summer had come, with their beautiful, soft, lingering closes ; and in them Mortimer's countenance, even in Marian's eyes, resumed its usual serenity. Every sundown, when the heavens were gracious, would he spend with her in the unfrequented fields and lanes, manifesting his undying love for Nature's many moods, and his unquestionable affection for the dear one at his side. July passed away. The fifteenth of August was again approaching ; and this year Mortimer said, with a playful retrospect to the disappointment of the last, they were sure to spend it together. Externally, at least, the conjugal life was more intimate and more abounding with quiet bliss.

But there was now another element of half-silent joy, though as yet but a promise not fulfilled, to knit them together, and outweigh, if it could not destroy, any countervailing drawback. The dear wife was soon to be the dearer mother. Eight short weeks more, and baby-cries would musically drown the past. It was difficult to say which of the two hungered more for the event. Mortimer did not fully, or indeed anything like fully, apprehend

the real difficulty which had chiefly made Marian what she had been and what she still occasionally was — dull, low-spirited, tearful, whimsical ; he thought, exacting. But whatever estimate he took of the cause, he felt that the arrival of the Expected would drive it entirely away, once and for ever. But I suppose the palm of yearning must, even in this case as in every other, be given to the mother. She, too, counted upon the little ambassador, laden with full powers, who would renew, or rather establish, their complete and unalterable love. She would not be jealous then, she was sure, even of intangible dreams. He would cease, even so much as mentally, to be concerned by the past, when that sweet future should interlace them both in a dear dependent little all-in-all.

Meanwhile Mortimer had not been idle, and his activity had not been barren of result. He was now firmly established on two magazines, and had been informed by the editors of both that he might, if he chose, increase the length of his contributions. Even as it was, he might calculate with absolute certainty on obtaining by his pen an income of a hundred and fifty pounds. This was the result,

after close upon two years' intelligent holding-on ; so that, what with his own seventy and Marian's fifty pounds a-year, he saw himself in morally secure possession of an income of two hundred and seventy pounds. Again his thoughts turned to Italy. Even now-a-days, such a sum would there be equivalent in what it brought to twice its amount in England ; and at the time of which I write, I am safe in saying that in the less expensive cities of the then still-enthralled peninsula, it would represent a home income of more than six hundred pounds.

But this was not all. He had recently received a long and important letter from Bracebridge. Honest Guy himself was in pretty much the same condition as ever ; in worse than ever, if his lugubrious statement could be trusted. He was going to the dogs and the devil, and it was not a bit of use, not a bit, and so forth ; but he was delighted at Mortimer's success. He could tell him that he had heard several people talking about his magazine articles, and all were loud in their praise ; for himself, he thought them stunning'—stunning. He wished to Heaven *he* could write some like them ;

but he couldn't, and that was all about it. He could write something good, he was sure ; not so good as Mortimer's, but something. However, nobody would have it. Some fellows were lucky ; *he* wasn't. He was knocking on in the old way, and supposed he should knock on somehow to the last ; but it was sorry work. He should so much like to see Mortimer and his wife ; *he* had no wife. Damme, he had nothing. He should so much like to see them ; but he really couldn't afford to run over. Was there any chance of seeing Mortimer in England ? Horncastle he never saw at all now—never ; but he heard a good deal—everybody heard a good deal. He wished he did not hear quite so much. The fellow was terribly in debt—only parliamentary privilege saved him from arrest. It could not last much longer. Suppose he clung on till the next General, he would be sure to be unseated, and then there would be an end ; however, he—Bracebridge—saw nothing of him, nothing. And he was the old boy's ever most faithfully. Than which, we may be certain, there never was truer assurance.

Supposing that Guy Bracebridge was correct in

the slight but important information which he gave concerning Grattan Horncastle, it can scarcely afford ground for astonishment. Mortimer had heard neither from nor of him for a considerable time, but constantly thought of his old friend and of the marvellous pluck which he had displayed. He had now been in the House of Commons three years, and cut as good a figure there, as far as Mortimer could gather from newspaper reports, as any young man of his standing; but what could not be gathered from such sources, and what Mortimer had no means of knowing at all save through Bracebridge's vague and by their long continuance somewhat discredited prognostications, was the wonderful ingenuity wherewith the man must have encountered financial difficulties of no common order. He had entered Parliament, pledged to a party which had returned, from the same electoral campaign that had returned him, terribly thinned and disheartened; and now in this year of grace 1844, Sir Robert Peel and his followers were not only as numerous, but seemed as yet fully as compact, as ever. Whilst the disproportion between the Government and the Oppo-

sition remained so great, the leaders of this last had no reason to pay much court to any one individual, especially when the Opposition happened to be Whig, and the individual in question had nothing to recommend him but his abilities. These, however, kept him, for all Guy's doleful prophecies, still bravely afloat; though a brief interview which occurred about this time in the tea-room of St. Stephen's may throw a little light on the actual state of his position. Old Dyneley had, since Mortimer's departure from England, discontinued those singular marks of intimacy with which he had, from the date of Sleeper's garden-fête down to that event, treated Mortimer's friend; but of late again, it seemed to Horncastle that the former courtesy was returning. Once or twice recently the member for Pocketford had inquired if he had heard anything of Mortimer, and to-day again the question was repeated.

‘I have not, very recently. He is still at Caen, and—as I told you before—is married. He has been a great fool.’

‘You think so?’ said old Dyneley.

‘Of course I do. The merits of his quarrel

with you I do not fully understand ; but be they what they may, he was most unwise to fall out with you who, as far as I could ever gather, have done your utmost to serve him. You know I did everything in my power to keep him straight, and opposed his obstinacy from first to last.'

'I know you did,' said the other, significantly ; 'I really owe you a debt which I never paid.'

'To tell the truth, I acted in what I thought Mortimer's interest ; though certainly, Mr. Dyneley, I was not indifferent to yours. But if you think you are really in my debt—which I by no means wish to hint—you have an excellent opportunity of doing me a good turn now.'

'And that is?'

'A money one, of course.'

'I suppose so. How much do you want?'

'Well, Mr. Dyneley, you are a rich man, we all know ; and it would not do to ask you for a paltry sum. Can you lend me a couple of thousand pounds?'

'It is a big sum,' said the other ; 'but I'll tell you what I will do. You say you have seen nothing of Mortimer of late. Well now, say no-

thing to him ; but go and find him and his wife out. Show that you are the clever fellow we all take you for, and bring him back to England. The day that he and I shake hands through your influence, the two thousand pounds are yours : not a loan, but a gift.'

' You are very good, and propose an errand that I am only too glad to go upon ; indeed, but for the session, I should have been over to see him before this. At any rate, as soon as it is over, if not before, I will run across, and see what can be done.'

The division bell rang, and they parted ; but as old Dyneley looked after the figure of the more quickly-moving since more dependent young member, he muttered to himself :

' In your debt, eh ? Both ways, my fine fellow. You think I know nothing about the 'Tuck business, and who set that scoundrel on at the last election. Two thousand pounds ! Very likely. However, bring that young jackanapes and his wife back, and we'll see about the rest. Only get them over, and I'll break the spirit of that calm, proud, little devil at Richmond, yet !'

Mortimer meanwhile, innocent of all such plan-

ning, and by this time—now the middle of August—oblivious even of the director means by which there had been held out to him inducements for return, worked and loved loyally, and was beginning again to allow himself what had long been denied—the luxury of looking forward to the future. Now that, by dint of long sticking to his desk, he had obtained that assurance of regular employment and regular remuneration which I have fully described, he halted a moment in order to dedicate himself entirely to the more pretentious task which now approached completion. Another six weeks, and a volume of poems would be ready for submission to a publisher, and thence he trusted to the public. He took occasion to explain his plans, now that he had made them, to Marian. At the commencement of October he should run over to England, remaining there as brief a time as possible; but he considered it highly desirable that he should himself personally attend to the arrangements requisite for the publication of his book. Over and above that motive which was of itself sufficient, he had received from the editors of both the magazines to which he contributed, reiteratedly-

expressed wishes to see him whenever he found himself in London. These he could, to his own benefit, gratify at the same time. Marian would, at the commencement of October, be yet a month from the anticipated time of her confinement. She should come with him as far as Hâvre, where she would have during his absence the advantage—so great at that time of the year, and especially in her circumstances—of the bracing sea-breezes. Should the visit to England prove as satisfactory as he expected, he proposed that in the spring they should quit Caen, and migrate with the treasure which would then be strong, to the beautiful, kind land of which he had talked to her so often and so enthusiastically. Was she pleased?

On the whole, she was. Of course, she did not like his being away from her; still she would not in October be equal to a long journey; and even had she been so, she knew that the expense of taking her with him would be too great. She should be delighted to go to Hâvre, and was quite sure that the change would do her good. She would be lonely without him; but then his absence would not be long—would it?—and she would look across

the waters till he came back. About the book, of course he knew best. Would he let her read the poems before he took them with him?

Would he! He should be only too glad; he should have shown them to her long ago, had he thought that she would have cared to see them. There, were some of them. He was much surprised, but still more gratified, at her request. Really, men are very stupid.

The poems were, it is true, as impersonal as they well could be; but the luckless rascal who has once written verse, or even prose of the composite order, must ever after take his chance of the world's judgments. The result of sheer curiosity, they are not likely to be reversed or much modified by arguments intrinsic or external. *Litera scripta manet*: the printed document remains to some purpose. Out of the least dogmatical of all books, a thousand definite and indefinite creeds have been erected. The honest Shakespeare will continue to be a deer-stealer, and Göthe will be regarded as muddle-headed as Faust and hail-fellow-well-met with Mephistopheles, to the end of time. The profound Jean-Jacques still lives as a sentimental

dreamer; poor Shelley is known to most of us as an atheist; and Byron, despite Tom Moore, is only just unlike the Corsair in having *not* 'one virtue, but a thousand crimes.' Who knows? For an evanescent month or two, even I, who am the sheerest historiographer in the world, shall perhaps be considered as having loved Isabelle Chesterton and positively married to Marian De Saintfront; so determined is an enlightened public to associate authors with the sins—I never knew them associated with the virtues—of the creatures of their imagination.

Marian had stronger grounds for being curious than ordinary readers; and though, as I say, her husband's as yet manuscript poems were thoroughly impersonal, we may be quite sure she did not find them so. It would be idle to suppose that in compositions which are or ought to be authentic messages of the great inner life, a subtle analyzer acquainted with Mortimer's peculiar history could not point to several passages, whose views and tone were suggested and informed by the decided experiences of his career. How could it be otherwise? The Inductive Method, now invading psychological

after having invaded physical phenomena, more and more assures us that, in the first sphere as in the second, we can argue, as Pope and Bolingbroke told us long ago, 'but from what we know.' Mortimer no doubt had written out of himself; influenced in his choice of subject, in his language, in his very metre, by the omnipotently guiding if invisible hand of the past. No occurrences were introduced which bore the faintest resemblance to those of his other days; but for all that, Marian saw in the well-covered leaves little more than shadowy renderings of the shadowy dream which she dreaded and detested. That such were there, though both few and slight, is exceedingly probable; but all the rest was to her a blank. If a page could be strained to refer to the subject of her fear, upon that she dwelt. If it could not—well, it meant nothing at all, and she passed it over. When, on returning them, she was anxiously asked by her husband what she thought of them, she replied that a great many she did not understand, and the rest she did not like at all.

This was disappointing, no doubt; but Marian's literary opinion could not be regarded as final, and

scarcely, indeed, of any value at all. Upon an indifferent literary point her judgment, like that of almost everybody else, would have been worth some little ; but this was not to her an indifferent one. She had unmistakably shown her aversion to this portion of her husband's labours, even while they were being prosecuted ; and she was too logical in her dislikes to like the poems now that they were completed. She was very sorry, but—she did not care for them.

October came, however, and with it, of course, no change in Mortimer's plans. To-morrow they were to start for Hâvre, Jeannette being left behind to take care of home. Mortimer would spend a couple of nights with Marian in the place before starting for England, in order to accustom her to it, and to assure himself that she was comfortable. The weather was most propitious. They went by water, and arrived at Hâvre towards sundown. Marian was delighted at the change, and the big bluff waves and the bright bracing air. The whole of the next day he spent with her, enjoying it even as she did. The next day was not so favourable. The sky was overcast, and by noon, shortly after

which time Mortimer had to start, it began to drizzle. Would not Mortimer put off his journey?

‘O no, my darling! It is wet, but that is nothing. The sea is perfectly calm; there is no use in putting off what must be. It will be for a very short time; I shall soon be back. Put a good face on it.’

She tried to do so.

‘Yes, dear, go, and be back as soon as possible.’

‘You will not be dull?’

‘Not if you come back soon.’

‘Very soon. And then we shall return to Caen; and then—’

‘O yes, then!’

And her eyes glowed again as she thought of the coming little messenger of peace and love.

‘And in the spring, Italy. Well, good-by, *carissima*.’

And he gave her the farewell kisses, and left her quietly weeping and looking after him through the rain-slobbered panes. He looked up and kissed his hand, she gazing lovingly and muttering the fond God bless you! which he did not hear.

He was just stepping on board when a well-

known voice, followed by a hearty shake, burst upon him.

‘Hallo! Mortimer, my boy; going to England? Why, I have just come from it.’

It was Grattan Horncastle, looking hale and joyous, in a rough pea-jacket and a defiant wide-awake.

‘Come on board. I dare say we have ten minutes yet.’

‘O yes; good. What are you running across for? Are you going back to stay there?’

‘Hardly,’ said Mortimer. ‘No; I am going over only for a very short time—ten days or so, I trust, at most.’

‘Where then?’

‘After that, back to Caen; my wife is here.’

‘Really!’

‘Yes; at the hotel. See. No, we cannot see it from here. Yes, we can, by Jove! I almost think that is she at the window; but it’s such a distance. However, she’s staying there. In another month or so I hope to wear paternal honours; and I thought it would do her good to come down even here for a little before her confinement. Other places on this

coast are so deadly dull ; and as she is alone, I did not like to leave her to herself in places where there is nothing to look at. There is plenty here to amuse her for a few days. Are you going to stop here ?'

'Not long.'

'But you will go and see her ? She will know your name well enough ; I have often spoken of you. But here is my card. See ; I have written on it. There's the bell !'

'Yes ; I must go. Very likely I shall look you up at Caen. I am going to take a turn through Normandy during the recess.'

'Capital. *Do* come. Are you alone ?'

'U—m,' said Horncastle, hesitating ; 'Yes ; quite.'

'Good-by, then, for the present.'

'Good-by, old boy ! *Bon voyage !*'

And the vessel shook herself loose from the quay.

Marian, from her distant window, watched it recede, recede, and then utterly vanish in the mist. At first she did not feel quite so low as she had expected to be. But as the afternoon wore on,

and the rain never ceased, the sensation of loneliness gained upon her. The landlady was a worthy, comely, middle-aged dame, and to her attention Mortimer had especially recommended his wife. He had also, of course, obtained, through Madame's instrumentality, a servant whose duty it would be, during his absence, to give both attendance and time exclusively to Marian. But Marian did not, as the phrase is, fancy her; and whilst kindly receiving her services, by no means encouraged her society. The landlady amused her; but it happened to be a busy time, and with the best intentions in the world, and loving nothing better than a gossip with her lady visitors, the excellent hostess could not manage to find as much leisure as she should have liked to devote to the interesting young wife. Whatever the cause, Horncastle did not call either the following day or the day after, and she, of course, quite unaware of his presence in the place, did not miss him.

But when the following morning again opened in rain, and the inhospitable weather continued, with but trivial intervals, into the night and on into the following day, the sense of dismalness waxed more

and more intense. It was awfully dreary. What could she do? Nothing. What was she likely to think about? About Mortimer and his errand, and his absence. She wondered if he would see *Her!* If he would *go* and see her. She had not liked to ask him; she had not dared; she knew he would be so angry. He would have a great deal of time on his hands in London, whilst his manuscript was being examined. Was he likely to meet her accidentally, as before? Not in London, perhaps; but if he went to Richmond it was more than likely that they would meet. And would he not go to Richmond? What was there to keep him in London? She herself did not know the banks of the rural river; but he had often described them to her—how beautiful they were—how winding—how peaceful. He was immensely fond of boating. Was it not probable that he would row up to Richmond? She remembered he had once described to her a spot called somebody's seat—she could not recall the name—from which there was a magnificent view of the valley, the river, and all the glorious woodland prospect. It was exquisite, he had said, and especially in autumn, when all the many-coloured

tints were on the fine old trees. And this was autumn, and the trees would now be turning rapidly. He would be sure to go. With all his love for boating, and for nature, and with all his old associations, how could he stay away? And if he went! They would be certain to meet! And even if they did not accidentally do so, how would he be able to be so near, to look down upon—no doubt from what he had called the terrace, he could in the distance see—the princely mansion where she dwelt, or at least the pleasant garden trees that held her hidden within their girdle, and not want so much as a glance at the beautiful unhappy form which had been the central figure of his romance of life? And the little one, whose birth had caused him such strange meditation, and his knowledge of which he had striven to hide from her—would he not be curious to see *it*? Could he so be bound to the mother and be indifferent to her offspring—perhaps now her chief comfort? He would go—he would be sure to go. If he did not meet her accidentally he would seek her out—he would certainly seek her out. Perhaps he had already met her; perhaps he he was with her *now*!

As I have said, Marian's was no foul, vulgar jealousy. Her dread was of no fiery furnace through which he was likely to pass. Her own thoughts were too blameless, and her estimate of Mortimer was too superb, for her to conjure up any such importunate dangerous flames. Could they have been presented to her by some imagination less leal than her own, she would have proudly laughed their terrors to scorn. The Hebrew Three could not have passed through fiery furnace more unscathed than she felt would pass her Mortimer. No; it was not that; it was the dread of another draught of those bitter waters whence the dream—the horrible calm dream—had sprung. He would drink again, and it would be strengthened. Again he would see Isabelle; no more infirm than he, but strong, brave, resigned, loving, and martyred still. Her re-seen image, re-heard voice, re-pitied tears, would bring back the picture of her wrongs and his, and give to them the vividness of old. He would return more incurable than ever.

She worked herself up to a pitch of dreary madness. Where her thoughts would, if uninterrupted, have led her, it is not easy to conjecture. But

when she had well-nigh lost all control over them, the landlady came opportunely to the rescue. She feared that Madame Dyneley must be very dull.

‘Oh, dreadfully! I never was so dull in my life. I am so sorry that I came.’

‘Ah! the weather is bad, and I have been so busy, or I should have been in before this afternoon. But if Madame is so very lonely, I think I have some little society for her that, at present, would be both agreeable and useful.’

Marian inquired what this was.

‘*Eh bien!* Madame was going to be a mother shortly, and of her first child, was it not? Well, there was a lady in the hotel—an Englishwoman, young, and really charming, madame—so gay, always gay—who has just got such a beautiful baby. Only five days ago. And, would Madame believe it? she was already sitting up, and singing, and happy, and saying she would go out in three or four days. It was *incroyable*—incredible, but true. She had never known such an instance—not even herself; and she had always been very fortunate, and strong, and brave, and without fancies. Would not Madame like to see her? And the baby!’

Marian said that she should.

‘It would amuse Madame now, and it would be of so much use to her shortly. She would learn all about it, and it would be agreeable for both.’

‘Will it?’ Marian asked. ‘Perhaps she would not like to be disturbed so soon, or to see anybody.’

‘But yes, madame. The lady asked who was in the hotel; and on hearing that there was another young wife here, she was so anxious to see you.’

‘Does she know my name?’

‘Yes; I told her. And she desires so much—indeed, she sent me to see if you would not go and visit her.’

‘Is she alone?’

‘Except a domestic; who, between Madame and me, is not very nice. But that’s nothing; you will be left together, and perhaps you will become friends.’

‘But where is her husband?’

‘Like Madame’s, I suppose—away. But Madame will find out all about that, if she will only have the goodness to go and see for herself.’

Marian smoothed her hair and brightened up, and followed the landlady in and out and up and

down little passages and staircases, till the latter stopped and knocked gently at a door. It was opened immediately but quietly by a woman who put her fingers to her lips, and said in English :

‘Hush ! Baby is asleep.’

‘This is Madame Dyneley, come to—’

‘Wait one moment.’

And the door was closed, but not fastened, whilst there was a brief—very brief—colloquy within. It was soon reopened with a—

‘Yes, come in ; quietly, please.’

The landlady left, and with her also the woman who had opened the door. And Marian at once found herself alone in the presence of the mother, who was sitting smiling by the window at the end of the room.

‘How good of you to come !’ said a voice, subdued evidently not by weakness, but by consideration for her slumbering infant. She rose and stepped forward to meet Marian.

‘Oh ! do not rise, I beg of you !’ said Marian, hurrying forward to stop her.

‘O yes ; I can walk easily now. It is five days ago, you know, and I am terribly strong.’

Marian was amazed, and perhaps disappointed too. She knew very little about such matters ; but she had always supposed, and rightly enough, that the pains and perils of maternity, however sweet, are by no means slight. She was just aware of the routine rules usually followed, when they can be followed, on such occasions, by virtue of which a fortnight's imprisonment in bed is about as little as could be insisted on. She was perfectly ignorant of the exceptions ; and was astounded at what must be confessed the singular exception which she encountered now.

‘You may feel strong,’ said Marian, sitting by her, and retaining her hand as though it was that of an old friend. (How kin the one great touch of nature makes the whole world of women!) ‘You may feel strong, but I am sure, you ought to husband your strength. Is it a boy?’

‘No ; a girl ; such a pet ! Would you like to see her?’

‘Yes ; but you must not come. Don’t stir.’

‘O yes, I will.’

‘No, no.’ And Marian strove to keep her down in her seat. ‘Then we will go by-and-by. You

have been disturbed once already, just now. Perhaps we should wake it.'

'Well, you shall see it by-and-by, then. It is so good of you to have come.'

'I was only too delighted. I am quite alone, my husband having gone to England for a short time. Where is yours?'

'Down at Dieppe. I expect him soon.'

'Has he seen the baby?'

'Yes; just seen it; but he was obliged to go away almost immediately after it was born; indeed, as soon as he saw I was all right.'

'Is it your first?'

'No; second. But the first did not live. Oh! I must take you to it.'

And Marian despite, she rose, and together they crept over to where the rosy little lump of humanity lay sound asleep.

It would be very easy to report the conversation that ensued; but all women can imagine, and no man would care to read it. It is more important to note what can be noted of this new apparition in our story.

She looked about eight-and-twenty, was rather

tall, strongly, but not stoutly built, and was what is perhaps best expressed by the phrase 'well put-together.' It was impossible to call her handsome, yet equally so to deny that she was uncommonly good-looking. Her complexion, like her hair and eyes, was dark, but dark with considerable colour in it. Gazing at her, you could believe that the occurrence of the last few days which prostrates most fine ladies, had but increased her spirits and sparkle without taking away much—and that much but for a very brief time—from her robustness. Was she a lady? This at least was the question which Marian asked herself. Had she been anything but strikingly natural, had she indulged in ever so little affectation, she would have settled the point against herself at once. But it certainly would have been to narrow the sense of the word very intolerantly, to refuse to permit it to be applied to that easy, frank, pleasant, and evidently energetic person. She did not talk French, she told Marian, and understood it but indifferently; but she spoke English with as complete freedom from provincial peculiarities as from those finer artifices of pronunciation, which Marian, unaccustomed to

England, withal detected in her husband's speech. Whatever she was, Marian already liked her vastly, and before a couple of hours were over, the two were, in female parlance, 'great friends.' In answer to quite natural inquiries, the new acquaintance informed Marian, that her name was Dalton—Grace Dalton—that her husband was in the navy, and that she had been married nearly three years.

Conversational intimacy with one of her own sex, was to Marian a complete novelty, and therefore in itself no slight pleasure ; but this intimacy being formed under such circumstances, and with one whose situation in an all-important point so closely resembled her own, gave it additional value and charm. By the time they separated for the night, Marian had unboomed herself to a considerable extent ; and what she had not communicated that evening, she got rid of the following morning. That Mrs. Dalton should appear interested was anything but strange ; since Marian felt that Mortimer's history, which of course was inextricably mixed up with her own, and about which there was no call to be reticent—had in it elements that must of necessity interest any listener.

You may commence an ingenuous *tête-à-tête*, with what intentions of maintaining certain limits you like ; but the chances are a million to one that the limits will be overstepped. Marian had told the whole story of her husband's disaster, previously to her acquaintance with him ; and in this narration, Isabelle's name had been often and freely used. Marian had throughout spoken of her most kindly ; and the last thing that, at the commencement of the conversation, she would have thought of alluding to, was the unhappy influence which Mortimer's old love cast over her own existence ; but at last it transpired, at first slowly, then more fluently. At first the confession oozed out in innuendoes. Finally it broke forth in a full avowal of what had been her state of mind at the very moment that the landlady had arrived to ask her to go and see Mrs. Dalton. Her jealousy, being like its cause, of the finest and most immaterial character, it was such as without indelicacy or dishonour to her husband she could both name and discuss. It was impossible to blame, to accuse Mortimer, on account of it, she said. She cast no reproaches upon him ; but she thought there was every palliation, indeed every

reason, for her trouble. She could not help it. It dwelt with her—it never left her; sometimes it nearly drove her distracted. Yesterday, she owned she thought she should have gone mad. What did Mrs. Dalton think?

She thought there was a good deal to be said for Marian's state of mind, though she deplored it, and wished that it were otherwise. An experience so romantic—for romantic it undoubtedly was—as Mr. Dyneley's (she meant Mortimer's, of course) had been with Isabelle Chesterton, could not fail to leave behind it a romantic impression. She could only say that Marian was very fortunate in having two such people to deal with as her loyal husband, and the poor proud girl who appeared to have loved him so truly. That both of them had behaved and were still behaving admirably, even Marian's own account most irrefragably established.

'That, Marian granted—granted cheerfully. But not the less—indeed all the more, was her husband enslaved to a past, because it had in it no element of dishonour.

Mrs. Dalton quite understood that; and she would not be frank if she did not confess that there

was cause, without imputing blame to anybody, for grievous disquietude on Marian's part.

All her disquietude would be removed, Marian said, if she could but be brought face to face, and have her husband with her brought face to face, with the disturbing spectre. Thus and thus only could it be laid? The romantic past would not be able to hold its own against the plain, practical everyday present. If she could only know, know intimately, and consort with this woman, whom really she rather loved than hated! *Indeed* she loved her.

‘But her husband’s conduct, I suppose, prevents its possibility?’

‘It did at first, and would, of course, for ever have done so. But, since my husband’s marriage, his cousin has done everything in his power to effect a reconciliation.’

‘And your husband will not hear of it.’

‘Not only will not hear of it, but is angry—the only time he has ever been angry—with me, if I mention it at all; and this torments me. Oh! you do not know how much it torments me. It is the very proof to me that he cannot rid himself of

the influence of old memories. They dominate him still.'

'Well, but patience ! That will wear away.'

'I doubt it ; but tell me, do you not think that the means I mention are the only means of curing him ?'

'You all knowing each other ?'

'Yes.'

'I confess I do. It is true that it is difficult for a man to overlook in another such an outrage as your husband has received at the hands of his cousin. Still, now that old Mr. Dyneley holds out terms of friendship, and your husband has obtained for himself full reparation in obtaining you, *I* should advise his forgetting the past altogether, and making the best of the present.'

'Oh, if he only would ; but I never dare allude to the subject again.'

'You will dare, by-and-by.'

'When ?'

'When you have got still stronger hold of him by the pledge which you will shortly give him.'

'Do you think so ?'

'I am sure of it. I really do not think that you

have any cause to make yourself miserable because he offers the most determined opposition to a scheme which you, nevertheless, are quite right to press. It would be wonderful indeed if he at once listened to proposals of reconciliation with his cousin. Good men are so awfully proud. They will ruin themselves and everybody else for their dignity.'

'Mortimer would, I am sure.'

'Very likely; but he will give in at last; especially when you hold in your arms a skilful little junior who will second all your pleadings.'

'How I long for it! I have calculated upon it so much, and am enormously consoled to hear what you say. It strengthens me by showing me that I was right, both in my wishes, and in my belief that baby would assist me to attain them.'

'Of course it will—when it comes.' And then—for the first time they kissed each other. And Marian felt that she loved this brave, strong creature. She had found somebody, at last, to whom she could say anything or everything; one upon whom she could lean and not be too heavy. The hale young mother understood her strange troublous predica-

ment, appreciated it, sympathized with it, took a vivid interest in it. She agreed with all of Marian's views, and differed only as to the opportune time for carrying them into effect. She saw all the difficulties, yet held out the most encouraging hopes. It would all come right, if the promised messenger arrived. Faith evokes faith, strength induces strength. It was impossible to look at that six days' mother, smiling, laughing, chattering, moving about, and not to feel stronger by the sight. To-morrow, she said she should go out for a drive.

‘Oh!’ said Marian.

But she would. She knew well enough what she could do. The doctor! She really did not want to see *him* any more. It was all a parcel of nonsense. And she commenced singing. Marian must stop, and they would have tea together.

She was as good as her word. The following afternoon the two drove out. Marian was not well; and not even her companion's good spirits sufficed to rouse her. Mrs. Dalton was well wrapped up; but it was only by the shawls and rugs that anybody could have guessed she was supposed to be

even a temporary invalid. It was a lovely October day, and the sea was smooth and blue. Smooth and blue too was the sky. Mrs. Dalton said that she enjoyed her liberation immensely. Marian was low, nervous, and in pain.

At nightfall, the cause became more apparent. Poor Marian! she had fretted clandestinely, and worried herself almost to death in secret, and now had to pay the penalty. She heard of it with joy. Constant mental excitement had produced its common result. It had hurried the honourable suffering and rapture of maternity.

Alas! she knew but of half the penalty, and that half the one she could not regret. But the terrible completion of her lot had to come. Her child was dead. And Grace Dalton—even the strong, stout-hearted Grace Dalton—was pale, tight-lipped, and full of dread at her bedside.

‘I am here, dearest! I will nurse you, stay with you, see you through all.’

She made no empty boast. In and out—gently always—but still in and out, from her prostrate charge to her infant upstairs, and from it again to miserable Marian, backwards and forwards she

went, dividing her cares impartially between the two, herself utterly unthought for. She seemed to require no thinking for. She waxed upon her very energies. Each was equally dependent upon her; each equally otherwise helpless. She ruled sweetly, but still she ruled, and in the rule manifestly rejoiced. Four days had passed, and then she brought a letter to Marian.

‘It came the day before yesterday, only I did not think you fit to be excited. You are now, are you not?’

‘O yes, give it me. It will be from Mortimer.’

It was. It announced his safe arrival in London, and his being at Bracebridge’s rooms. He feared now, from what he saw, that he should be away longer than he had expected, probably a fortnight. Marian must cheer up; a fortnight would soon be over. The rest was to us unimportant, though to her every word was terribly precious, and in every word she sought for meaning.

But her hopes were shattered now! Better that he should remain away a fortnight, that she might be prepared to meet the future. He would be bitterly disappointed. Would he be alienated

from her? Which question her companion kindly and jokingly told her was nonsense; and that if she did not talk more reasonably, she would not be allowed to talk at all, but would have to lie quiet and say nothing. But it was all to no use. It seemed as though she really were determined to fret her little heart out, if not her little life away altogether. Her last hope was gone. Things would be worse than ever. She would have no influence at all, now. The dream would be more omnipotent than ever. And blent with all this, came the more ordinary but touching maternal laments for a loss that will not be comforted.

She had written to Mortimer the very day preceding the night of her misery, telling him of the friend that she had made, and how much this fortunate acquaintance helped to reconcile her more to his absence, which she trusted, however, would not be long. This was written and sent before the receipt of his first letter. Now came another from him, in answer to hers, saying how delighted he was that she had met with so charming a person, and that this materially quieted his mind, as he hoped it would quiet hers, with regard to what

he had to announce, *viz.* that he could not be at Hâvre at the soonest before ten days more from that date. Literary matters alone detained him. He was not able to make the arrangements which he desired, as quickly as he had anticipated. But the moment these were completed, he would rush back to her. He hoped she would tell him more about her new acquaintance. Had she not been visited by his old friend Grattan Horncastle, of whom she had heard him speak so often? He was in Hâvre, and had promised Mortimer to call upon her; but she had not mentioned him.

This letter was received on the seventh day after Marian's confinement, and Mortimer would still be absent for more than a week. Marian, though a striking physical contrast to her kind, wonderful nurse, was progressing favourably, each day witnessing material improvement, at least in her strength; and four or five days more saw her sitting up among soft pillows by the window that overlooked the sea. But with her strength seemed to wax her fears, her dread, her despondency, her deplorable hopelessness. 'All was over,' she said.

The prospect which, during all the long, silent, suffering months, had kept her at the worst moments from despair, and in the best had buoyed her up into patient faith, had faded utterly away. Not only was she without the aid of that advocate upon whom she had so reliantly calculated, but her own pleading would now have less authority even than before. She would not be able to urge the claims of one too weak to help itself; and her own would be as much disregarded as ever. She wished she were dead, and it were all over. She was pitiable to hear and to look at.

‘I must write and tell him,’ she said.

‘Do you think you *could* write?’

‘Yes, a few lines. I must. What shall I say?’ she asked helplessly.

‘Mrs. Dalton had her babe in her lap. It was fast asleep.

‘Think of *my* case,’ she said. ‘I have seen my husband, but only to say good-by to him for five or six months.’

‘Has he gone?’

‘Yes, with his ship. He is in the merchant service, as I think I told you. And here am I

infinitely more 'solitary than you ; and yet I intend to try to be happy till he returns.'

'*You have your baby.*'

'Tell me,' said the other, taking Marian's hand and looking fixedly at her, 'do you really think that you can never conquer your feeling about Isabelle Dyneley except by knowing and associating with her?'

'Never—never. How should I conquer my feeling by any other means, since by no other means can my husband conquer his?'

'But don't you think he will ultimately consent?'

'Not now—not now;' she said, piteously. 'He might have done had it been different, had my baby lived, had my baby lived. But not now, not now.'

'See, Mrs. Dyneley ! I love you very much ; I cannot help loving you, and would do anything to serve you.'

'I am sure you would,' said Marian, the sad, grateful tears running down her cheeks ; 'you have proved it.'

'Indeed I would. And a means presents itself

to my mind, by which I might possibly—indeed probably—benefit you, and obtain for you what you so much desire.’

‘How? Oh, do tell me how.’

‘You say that the only influence likely to break down your husband’s repugnance to reconciliation with his cousin, would be the joint influence of yourself and child?’

‘Yes, the child’s. Not mine alone, never. But the child might—would—would have overcome him. Oh! if my baby had but lived.’

The other rose very quietly, knelt by Marian’s side, laid the sleeping infant in her lap, and said:

‘Can this little innocent already be of use? Could she speak, I am sure she would be as ready as her mother to help you. Really I am not thinking of myself; I only avow my circumstances in order to explain my conduct. For at least six months, I and this little pet will be alone. I confess I should like to remain during them with you. Let it meanwhile be regarded as yours, and I will be its nurse. When it shall have effected all we want of it, again it will be wholly mine. When once your husband, by its instrumentality,

shall have been induced to accept a reconciliation in itself so desirable, but the real value of which he will then perceive to be in that dissipation of romantic influences, injurious both to him and to you, which it will be sure to produce, he will forgive not only this little mortal, but you and me, all of us, for a deception so temporary, and so fruitful in results. What say you?’

In the state of body and mind at which Marian had arrived, she was clay in the hands of the potter. She did not know. She would do anything—anything—to bring about the one only thing that could make life tolerable. Would this bring it about? Was it certain? Could they do it? How could they do it? If it failed! She would, she would. And she clutched at the baby. O no! she could not. But yet—. And so she rambled and raved, and objected and yielded, and saw difficulties and wept, and was wild; and was, body and soul, in the strong hands of the woman whom a fortnight before she had never seen.

As will readily be understood, Mortimer was almost as ignorant as man well could be of the trade department of publication. He certainly was

not unsophisticated enough to imagine that poems fetch large prices from publishers, except when fashionable or religious popularity attaches to their author. But he was a little surprised to find that two houses of first rank, whither on his arrival in England he carried himself and his manuscript, politely refused to do so much as look at it. They did not publish poetry at all, they said. This was quite enough to show Mortimer that, before advancing further, he had better obtain advice upon the subject from somebody more competent than himself. The opportunity he had, a couple of days later. He took advantage of a most agreeable interview with the editor of the first magazine where his writings had seen the light, to lay before him the main object of his visit to England.

‘I wish you had mentioned the matter to me by letter before you came.’

Mortimer remarked that he had not then the pleasure of personal acquaintance.

‘I should not any the less have been delighted to give you the best advice in my power. And I must now tell you frankly that you will meet with considerable difficulty. There seems to be at

present very little what publishers would call demand for poetry, and it is not remunerative to publish it. However, what I would suggest is, that you take a note which I will give you and leave it with your manuscript. From the house of which I speak you will receive every attention, and the most honest opinion. By them I should advise you to be guided.'

This counsel Mortimer followed. And the delay of which he had spoken in his second letter to Marian, arose from the time required by the gentleman in question for a proper perusal of his compositions. At last he received a letter, begging him to be good enough to call upon the firm. He did so and saw its head.

'I suppose, Mr. Dyneley, that you would wish me to be frank.'

'Quite so,' said Mortimer.

'The letter which you left with your manuscript was of itself quite enough to ensure for you with us the most favourable reception. We are acquainted with what you have written in the — Magazine, though we did not know your name till that letter was received. Those writings would

lead us to expect much from anything you put into our hands; and personally, I must say that we are not disappointed. But your poems are so directly at issue both in subject and treatment with what at present is the only kind of verse that the English public will look at, that it would be unfair to hide from you our opinion that the probabilities are strong against yours selling. We think very highly of them. But, Mr. Dyneley, we are not critics; we are publishers. We are not buyers; we are sellers. Highly as we think of your volume, we cannot buy, because we do not think we should sell it. If we thought differently of it from what we do, we should not offer to publish it all. We shall be most happy—indeed, we shall be proud—to publish it for you on commission. It is quite against our habit. But we really shall be very happy to make an exception in your case. Only, we feel bound to tell you that it is very unlikely that your book will pay its expenses. We say this frankly, in case money should be of any object to you.’

‘Unfortunately,’ said Mortimer, ‘money is of great object to me. I am not alone. I have duties

more imperative than that of publishing. I am disappointed, of course, at what you tell me. I think it most kind of you, and thank you sincerely. I shall assuredly follow your advice. If ever money be to me less important than it is now, may I—'

'Bring them to us again? Most certainly.'

So the matter ended. Straitened as Mortimer was in finances, and now more than ever called upon to be careful and watch against the on-coming expenses of the future, he could not feel justified in running any risk. But here there was scarcely question of risk; he was all but assured, on the very best authority, of the certainty of loss. He thought of his wife; he thought of the child whose little wants would soon be pressing upon him. Well, he could not tell what might happen some fine day; but for the present, the manuscript poems must be returned to their drawer.

He was most anxious to leave London and get back to Marian. He wondered there had been no second letter from her. Bracebridge had gone on a visit—rare occurrence for him, poor fellow! into Norfolk, to knock over some birds, and Mortimer had been living in his friend's rooms during

the last few days quite alone. To his delight, on reaching them this afternoon, he found a letter from his wife. He was surprised to see it dated from Caen. But his astonishment and pleasure were much greater on reading the unexpected news of her confinement. She had not written before—at first from want of strength, and then from the desire of being able to give him an unmistakable assurance, by her return home, how well she had thriven. She thought both she and the baby would be so much better with the home comforts about them. Mrs. Dalton had come with her. They had travelled by boat, getting on board at Hâvre, and arriving almost at their own door, as he knew, by water. She hoped he would not be angry at what she had done, and at her silence. She knew he was most anxious about the object of his journey to England, and she had not wished to hurry or perplex him. She trusted that she had done right.

God bless her! Of course she had. She said in a postscript that she had been able, with the money he had left her, to pay the hotel bill at Hâvre; so he had nothing to do but come straight home. How she longed to see him, and show him

baby! She hoped he would not be disappointed it was not a boy.

This postscript was written by Mrs. Dalton, Marian already being considered to have written as much as was good for her.

Mortimer at once hurried off home. Nothing was fast enough for him. For the first time of late, he was and showed himself impatient. How slow was the stride of time! how wearisome the wind, how indifferent were the waves! He had met in England with a great disappointment. But home would now make full amends. He thought only of Marian and his little daughter.

‘Here he is!’ exclaimed Marian’s friend, on the fourth evening after their arrival in Caen.

She stood up, pale and waiting. She heard his rapid stride—two steps at a time—on the stair. He rushed in. She fell into his arms, weak and wailing.

‘Where is baby?’ he asked. ‘Bring her here. Have I been away long, darling? How pale you look! No wonder. I ought to have been with you. You are excited, I know. But don’t weep, pet. And this is the young stranger?’

And taking it in his arms, he laid it in his wife's—safer, he said, than his—and poured out upon them both the manly tenderness which springs straight from the delicious dignity of being both husband and sire.

CHAPTER X.

WHATEVER objections at first presented themselves to Mortimer, and were by him expressed against Mrs. Dalton being admitted into his household, the pleadings in its favour were too strong and too well-timed to be disregarded. Marian herself was unable to suckle the child. But upon this, unfortunately, no additional reason could be based for the furtherance of her wishes; since the delicate whimsical little thing, whose name—though as yet never heard—was now Florence, would take neither to its real nor to its supposititious mother. So that it had to be brought up by hand. The arguments, therefore, for Mrs. Dalton remaining with them, were founded entirely on her own and Marian's combined and ardent wishes. She would be no expense to them, since she insisted on being allowed to contribute to the outlay of the modest establishment. Upon this point, however, Mortimer would

hear nothing further. *If* she stayed, she must stay as guest. In that case, she would go. Then she must, was Mortimer's answer. Oh, but she must not, pleaded Marian. Grace must give in upon the point. Would she not? Very well, yes : though she was very averse from doing so, she averred. And for the rest, the discussion lay between husband and wife.

If Mortimer only knew how good Grace had been to her ! How she had cheered Marian, got her through all her terrible time, nursed her, waited on her, done everything for her ! She really did not know what, in Mortimer's absence, she should have done without this Heaven-sent comfortress. Ordinary gratitude demanded that they should make her some return. Look at her, poor creature ! She was separated from her husband, had lost her baby, and was for the time friendless and alone. Her husband's relations, proud but not so poor as himself, had never taken the slightest notice of her, having been annoyed from the first at the marriage. Such was her own story. She frankly avowed that her husband, in marrying her, had married beneath him. And how brave, how cheer-

ful, how amiable she was under all these accumulated troubles. Her husband's relations might think as they chose, but she *was* a lady, was she not? At any rate, there was no fault to be found with her. And was she not immensely nice?

Mortimer was bound to confess that she was. His wide experience had naturally made him considerably expert in settling from appearances the real social position of people whom he chanced to meet. And it was quite plain to him that if the absent sailor was what is ordinarily meant by a "gentleman," he had certainly stepped rather out of his sphere to choose his wife. But social classification is perhaps more difficult even than physiological, or botanical, or any other classification equally perplexing with these; the strata, as in geology, overlapping and running into each other with puzzling irregularity. In parentage and education, she had doubtless been in the extensive border lands between the upper and lower middle-class; and hence, though without the more delicate refinement either in appearance or manner usually associated with the former, she was entirely without the conventional vulgarity of the latter, which dis-

tresses those not belonging to it. Sensitive, as we know, upon all such points, Mortimer could see nothing in Mrs. Dalton, even as a companion, to offend his fastidiousness. She was not a highly-polished lady, that was certain; but then she did not at all pretend or strive to be so. Though energetic, she was quiet; and though intensely active, never fussy. Mortimer began to think that she was the very woman Marian required. She had everything that Marian had not, and perhaps might infect his wife with an admiration, and perhaps the exercise, of qualities whose absence in herself he had always regretted. Nor could he deny that Marian's friend grew to be personally agreeable to him. Her evenness of temper, her brave cheerfulness in the face of all her discouragements, her attention to his wife and to him, insensibly won him over to more than tolerate her presenee for Marian's sake.

She had one other good point which told enormously in her favour. She was passionately attached to the child. Mortimer himself doting upon it, he could not but regard her all the more favourably for this her attachment. Jeannette was still their

only servant, and Mrs. Dalton would hear of nobody coming to share with Marian and herself the honours of attending upon now the most important personage in the household. This also vastly pleased Mortimer; since it not only proved her genuine interest, but also showed that she had an eye to domestic economies by which she herself in no degree profited. At the very least, it was a delicate, silent way of manifesting her appreciation of the hospitality which she enjoyed. But more than this, Mortimer thought. It demonstrated an anxiety to be rather a help than a burthen to him, to repay kindness by more than kindness, and a determination to satisfy him that, if he had admitted with little inquiry an utter stranger beneath his roof, he held under it now a disinterested friend. Such was Mortimer's judgment; and he would have been ungenerous if, with the data at his disposal, he had arrived at any other conclusion.

If her vast affection for the child afforded him unmingled satisfaction, Marian's apparently very moderate affection for it was a source of more than annoyance. At first he had attributed this to her weak state of health; but as she recovered her

former strength, her interest in the baby scarcely seemed to increase. It was not that she neglected or was indifferent to it; but it seemed to give her no active, positive joy. She was growing more passive than ever; and in this important matter, her passivity was peculiarly manifest. Still it extended to everything. As time wore on, it became evident that Mrs. Dalton was taking a decided lead in everything connected with household affairs. Not only was she not doing, as Mortimer had hoped that she would do, some good to Marian, but it seemed as though she was actually making her worse. Her energy, far from stirring up any in his wife, seemed to be a justification for the complete disappearance of what little there had ever been. Her gaiety and conversational promptness appeared to crush even the occasional outbursts with which Marian used of old to gladden his heart and make amends for her long fits of quietness.

Are men in such matters very exacting? Perhaps they are. But have they not every excuse? I talk of men who, by merit of their toil, have a right to expect some reward. And is it not a hardship, an injustice, a bitter disappointment, for a

brave man to work hard all day for the dear wife at home, and then coming home at night for sweet relaxation, to have the dispiriting greeting of a smileless face, perhaps of a dull or downcast one? The wife is 'low.' Low! Why? She does not know; but she is. Has anything happened? No; nothing. But something *must* have happened; or how could she be in such a state? No; nothing, really; but she has felt so stupid, so dull, so down, all day. And she looks so now. He, poor fellow, has had no time to be any of the three. He has been slaving like a Turk, and comes home—tired, perhaps, but quite ready to be merry, and wants for his happiness only a chirpy welcome and a smiling face, and he cannot have them. Mind! I do not speak of this as the rule; I do not speak of it even as a common case. I pray Heaven it be not! And even if it be, I am perfectly aware that the picture could be inverted, and smiling women at home awaiting men who are too tired to say a word when they do arrive, could be faithfully portrayed. I am well aware of all that; so let not women cry out. I am only speaking of the hardship of cases that bear some slight resemblance to Mortimer's.

He worked harder than ever; and when he had done working, he rushed off to a face that now rarely seemed anything but downcast. Marian *had* a reason, such as it was, and whatever may be thought of it. But Mortimer could see no reason, and was terribly chagrined.

As I say, he worked harder than ever. If he had for the present completely failed in the main enterprise of his journey, he had met with good fortune in the minor purposes to which he had turned it. If literature, in its higher forms, had awhile to be ignored, in its periodical aspect it promised him larger favours than before. Having avowed the comparative narrowness of his means, he had excited in one of the kindest of men—the editor, his interview with whom I narrated—an interest which, originally springing merely out of his writings, was now of a more direct and personal nature. And the immediate consequence was that it procured for him the opportunity at least of making a material accession to his earnings. This he was not now likely to neglect. And he toiled conscientiously and severely at such work as was suggested to him, in the hope that eventually he

might be able, without wronging those whose claims he had shown that he fully recognized, to save enough to justify him in running the pecuniary risk that lay in the publication of his poems. Now at least, when he worked, Marian was not without a companion. Indeed she had two companions. But the one which Mortimer would have liked to see the more important of the two, he was troubled to think would, alone, have been no companion to her at all. When she spoke to him of the child, it was usually to hint at the means within his grasp by which its prospects could be ameliorated, and its future assured. Of these he took as little notice as he could. At last, however, she left him no loophole of silence. Little Florence was in her lap, and she and Mortimer were alone.

‘Did you see Isabelle when you were in England?’ she suddenly asked.

Mortimer looked astonished.

‘See Isabelle when I was in England! When do you mean?’

‘When you were in England last, I mean; two months ago.’

‘In October?’

‘Yes.’

‘Certainly not; or I should have told you,’ he answered rather severely. ‘I have never seen her since I married you, Marian. Do you doubt it?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘What made you ask me such a question?’

‘I thought you might. Indeed I wish you had.’

‘And why, pray?’

‘For the same reasons that I have told you before.’

‘They are not reasons at all; they are only wishes—I had almost said, whims.’

‘Whims that I shall never cease to have.’

‘I am very grieved to hear it. I hoped you had conquered them.’

‘Not in the least. Would you not give way if it were for the benefit of this child?’

‘No; much as I love it, I certainly would not. It too must help me to maintain my honour, just as I told you, you ought.’

There was silence for a time. At last she said aloud, but half musingly:

‘I am glad you would not do it for the child.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you would not do it for *me*.’

‘I would not do it for both ; and in naming you thus together, I name the only two creatures on earth to whom my life and love are for ever bound.’

‘You would do it for *her* ; if *she* asked you.’

‘Who?’

‘Isabelle.’

‘We have discussed that, long ago, Marian. And as I told you then, that is quite a different matter. If Isabelle thought proper to ask me to be reconciled with the man who, after all, is her husband, my honour would then be quite safe ; and I could overlook a wrong-doing (not an injury, mind, but a wrong-doing) which she—the person most interested—thus proved that *she* overlooked. Between you and her there can be no competition, no comparison. She happens to be part-keeper of my honour, since an attempt upon it was made when it was associated with hers. I trust I need not say who is the sole possessor of my love.’

‘If I doubted that, Mortimer, do you think I should want to know her, and therefore you again to know her?’

‘Then why you want it, I fail to see.’ And Mrs. Dalton entered.

Mortimer retired to his own room, but was at first too much troubled to work. He thought, and thought, but could make out nothing satisfactory, indeed nothing reasonably intelligible, by his thinking. At last, the pen consented to come to his rescue; and in writing he for a time forgot his disquietude.

He and Mrs. Dalton—who, though Grace to Marian, was of course Mrs. Dalton to him—were by this time on a footing of complete intimacy. Yet she had soon discovered that he was not a man with whom a liberty could be taken. And as hitherto they had never discussed anything concerning his wife but her health, there had never been any attempt to introduce the discussion of points now far more remarkable. But that evening, when the two were together, Mrs. Dalton said that Mrs. Dyncley seemed very low.

‘Very,’ said Mortimer, with emphasis. ‘And upon my word I do not know why.’

The other had at last got her opportunity.

‘I think *I* do,’ she said.

‘Well, what is it?’

‘I trust you will not be offended, Mr. Dyneley?’

‘I hope there will be no cause.’

‘Perhaps I had better say nothing.’

Men are supposed to be incurious. The supposition is a complimentary hypothesis, unwarranted by facts.

‘No; say what you were going to say. I will promise not to be offended. I am sure you are sincerely interested in us all. I have found it so from the first, and so all along. I shall be most happy to listen to what you have got to say.’

‘I know your melancholy history, Mr. Dyneley. It is scarcely wonderful that your wife should tell me.’

‘I suppose not. I had rather she or anybody had the telling of it than myself.’

‘Then you are not displeased that I should know it?’

‘Not at all.’

‘You also know that Mrs. Dyneley is most anxious for the reconciliation that has been proposed to you?’

‘I know that too; but I confess I see no reason

why you should know it. Intimate and friendly as we are, Marian would have done better to say nothing to you upon that part of the subject which—being regarded differently by husband and wife—should not be discussed with anybody else.’

‘There, you are offended, I fear.’

‘No, I am not. And since Marian has spoken to you on the subject, you are free to speak upon it to me.’

‘If I am to speak freely, I confess I agree with her.’

‘And why?’

An argumentative conversation then ensued, which though on Mrs. Dalton’s side was carried on with greater adroitness than had ever been done by Marian, went over the very same ground, and adduced virtually the very same pleas, and was met by Mortimer with the very same objections. It lasted much longer than any discussion upon it with Marian had lasted; since Mortimer did not feel so much irritated by the reasoning of one not supposed to be interested as he had felt by his wife’s. This was only natural. But when Mrs. Dalton unveiled the profounder reasons for Marian’s

wish, which Marian herself had never been able to bring herself to avow, Mortimer grew impatient, and summarily shortened the discussion. He the victim of a dream! He under the influence of a romantic halo! True or not true, he did not wish to hear any more. As far as he could judge, Marian and her friend were both dreaming together. He was not, he said, at all angry with Mrs. Dalton. But he never should—never could—be made to alter his simple resolve; and he sincerely trusted that she would not encourage his wife in any such absurd notions.

Men rarely take the trouble to analyze their own feelings, and scarcely ever those of other people. The first process they would probably condemn as egotism, and the second as curiosity. So that we need not marvel if Mortimer had never, unaided, arrived at the discovery of the subtle reason which lurked under all Marian's more paraded reasons, and was the main if not the only cause of her discontent. And now that it had been put before him plainly, he was quite unable to grasp it. He had not waited to hear the matter fairly argued out; and if he had, he would probably have remained as

unaffected as he was now. His own view of the question was clear enough. There was no subtlety about *it*. Had he not, for motives anything but selfish yet quite sufficient, offered himself, his strength, his courage, his labour, his fidelity, his whole free future life, to Marian, and had she not accepted them? Had he ever withdrawn one iota of what he had offered? Had he not assisted all her infirmities, worked hard for her, and put a brave face upon every discouragement? Had he ever swerved a second from the firmest fealty to her? Had not his life, in brief, been exclusively hers? He could not help having an unfortunate past. She had been told of its existence: he had not hidden it from her. She knew quite as much about it before marriage, as she knew now. And surely he had shown by every means in his power, that he regarded the past *as* past, dead and done for, and impotent to interfere with the present or the future. What more could man do? If that confirmed knave had not written those confounded letters, first to him, and then to her, such a notion would never have entered into her head. However, the notion must be got out of it; for it was a mere notion

and nothing more. The worst was that this woman, whom he really liked very much, and whose society he expected to be beneficial to Marian, appeared positively to encourage the notion, and to see in it something substantial. Well, women were a strange lot: 'tickle cattle,' as the north-country phrase was. Even the best of them, the truest and the most sensible, were subject to unexplainable whims, meagrim, Heaven knows what. And it was he, forsooth, who was dreaming! He laughed loud. He had something else to do beside dreaming: all those pages of manuscript to be written before Tuesday week. And it should be done. So the sooner he set to work, the better. One thing, however, *must* be. In the early spring, they should go to Italy. The move would be an excellent opportunity for kindly getting rid of Mrs. Dalton, even if her husband had not returned. She was a very excellent creature, but she was doing Marian no good, however admirable might be her intentions. Now, Italy would do his wife all the good in the world. The first experience of that wondrous land was enough to win any impressionable mind away from even real sorrows, how much more from sheer

imaginary ones. It would be a veritably new life for her. Marvel would compel oblivion, would oust all foolish phantasies. Or if any faint relic of such strove to haunt her still, she would see in his joy at being farther and farther removed from the scenes of his abandoned past, convincing proof that he was a slave to no dream but that of her and their daughter's happiness. So he soliloquized, and satisfied himself.

Marian's satisfaction, however, was scarcely on the increase. Despite Mrs. Dalton's still persevering confidence that it would all come right, she had now arrived at the conclusion that it was all and irrevocably wrong. Mortimer had fancied of late not only that Marian did not grow to care more for the child, but that she also grew to care less for her friend. In this point at least he was not deficient in penetration. Now that it was apparent to her that he was and would remain against the one object of her heart as resolute as ever, she saw the perilous blunder which she had committed in practising a deception which had in its object miserably failed. But more than this. Now that she perceived the blunder, she wondered how she ever could have been

entrapped into it. For it *was* a trap. She had been, at the time of yielding to Mrs. Dalton's suggestion, weak in body and wild in mind. She would have snatched at almost any proposal that promised her what she yearned for, and what she yearned for still. Only *now*, all chance of obtaining it had vanished, and the deception remained, and its penalty would surely supervene. Had the scheme been successful, or did it hold out plausible hopes of success, Marian would have judged Grace Dalton more leniently. As it was, she regarded her as full half the cause of her present increased misfortune. If you think very meanly of her for thus forming her judgment of right and wrong, you must think very, very highly of yourself.

But what was to be done? At times she almost made up her mind that she would go and tell her husband of the error—not it seemed, the wrong—of which she had been guilty. But what would he say? What would he think? Had the deception attained the intended result—had it brought about reconciliation with Mr. Dyneley, given happiness to Isabelle, peace and joy to herself, and therefore, of necessity, intense satisfaction

to Mortimer, he then would have forgiven, though he might have blamed, the device, for the sake of its prosperous upshot ; but what would he say to a deception—and such a deception—which had been barren of everything but superadded misfortune ? Would he forgive *that* ? She would not even be able to say that she was at last satisfied, nor to promise, as the price of his forgiveness, that she would be quite happy to forego the object, for the purpose of obtaining which she had deceived him. She would still desire what she had so long and so vainly desired, and would be farther than ever from acquiring it. She had gained nothing so far. By confessing the truth, what could she gain but his anger, perhaps his disdain ? Withal, something would have to be done before long. Mrs. Dalton counselled patience. Perhaps waiting was still the wisest kind of conduct. She would wait ; she would not tell him just yet.

In this statical condition affairs remained, until the end of January of the new year, when one bright cold morning, Mortimer rushed in and exclaimed,

‘ News, Marian ! capital news ! At least *I* think so ; and I am quite sure you will, also. I have a

letter from one of my editors—the one of whom I spoke to you on my return from England. Listen to what he says.’ Mortimer read aloud :—‘ The managers of a daily paper, with whose name I will acquaint you later, should you think of entertaining the following proposal, want a correspondent in Italy. Your former papers in our magazine upon that country, attracted their attention at the time of their publication ; and they have consequently made inquiry of me, if I think it likely that the writer of them would proceed to Italy in the above capacity. The terms which they would offer, I am not exactly acquainted with ; but this much is certain, that they would considerably exceed your present literary earnings. Please reply at once ; and if you are tempted by the offer, I should strongly advise you to come to London immediately ; as a personal interview with the managers will of course be absolutely necessary, previously to your departure for your destination.’ ‘ There, Marian ! What say you to that ? ’

‘ I don’t know,’ she answered.

‘ But *I* do,’ said Mortimer. ‘ It is the very thing I wanted. It is splendid, a windfall, a god-

send. Upon my word, I think I am the luckiest fellow in the world ; but do I not almost deserve it? Have I not worked ?’

‘ Indeed you have.’

‘ And see our reward. Now, you must fully enter into it ; but you do not know—you cannot guess—what delights are in store for you. An entirely new country, and such a country ! I will take you all over it. Cathedrals, picture-galleries, monasteries, piazzas, palaces, the most varied of hills, the softest of valleys, without stint or end. Does not this fire you ?’

‘ They are very nice, I am sure.’

‘ And Italy in spring ! In the latter end of February, and the whole of March and April, it is simply paradise. You have no conception what their *primavera* is like. It is an intoxication, a rejuvenescence, I declare a second creation.’

Marian still was silent. He went on.

‘ We will break it kindly to Mrs. Dalton, and tell her of our intended migration across the Alps. Of course, she cannot expect to go with us, and indeed probably would not want. Her husband must be back soon. She has been very pleasant,

and I think we have done our best to make her comfortable ; but she could not always remain with us. You see all that ?’

‘ O yes.’

‘ And it will be a healthy change, I am sure, for dear little mite Florence : she will grow stronger in that kinder climate. But I think of you most. It will give you so much to think about, to see, to do. Here, I know, it is dreadfully dull for you.’

‘ Indeed it is.’

‘ Then are you not glad ? Is it not the very best thing that could have happened to us ?’

‘ No—not the best.’

‘ Why, what could be better ?’

‘ England.’

‘ Why England, my child ?’

‘ Because then—or supposing that then—you know what I mean.’

‘ No, I do not.’

‘ — That we should be friends with —’

He jumped up impatiently.

‘ Really, I thought I had heard the last of that. My dear girl, I cannot listen to you on that subject ; and for my life I cannot comprehend that you should

persist in it, or ever have thought of it at all. Let me tell you something.' And he went and sat by her again and took her hand. 'You are in want of occupation, that is all. Disquietude of mind, like disquietude of body, arises not from activity, but from rest. The employment of the mental faculties is at once their aliment, their anodyne, and their office. You would be all right, dear, if you had something to do. Look at *me*; look at anybody.'

To which the only answer was,

'I wish you did not work so much;' and then a flood of tears.

It was quite plain that words would do no good. But so delighted was he with the prospect before him, and so satisfied in his own mind that its fulfilment would exercise a magically therapeutic power over Marian's fanciful disorder, that he dedicated his attention exclusively to bringing it to pass with the greatest possible rapidity. Words might be no use; but action would be of complete avail. She might refuse beforehand to see what pleasures and advantages were about to be showered upon her, and linger in her nervous disease to the very last moment of her sojourn in Caen; but he would

stake his existence that, in spite of Horace's dictum, she would in changing skies change her state of mind ; that various Italy would work what could never perhaps be wrought in monotonous France ; and that the spires of Milan, the belfries of Tuscany, or the ruins of Etruria, would prove to her that if life was a dream, it was a very beautiful one—too beautiful to be darkened by deliberate and unhappy doubt. He did not pretend inwardly to himself that he had really got out of the shadow of his past. There was that in his past which would prevent him perhaps from ever getting entirely beyond it. But he was improving, and in Italy he should improve still more. Whatever sorrows he had, he thought he hid them from Marian. Never before had the future been so beckoning and so trustworthily in its promises. He would go to London at once. Yes ; to-morrow.

Mrs. Dalton was at once informed of the altered complexion of family matters. How strange ! she said. She was intending to go over to England in a week or so, to be away only a short time. But if Mr. Dyneley must go at once, she too would go at once, in order to have the benefit of his escort. It

was a great blow to her. She should be terribly cut up by having to be separated from them both; but of course it could not be avoided. But of that they need not talk till his return from England, and hers. Mortimer went off to write a reply to the letter he had received, and to announce therein his intended departure on the morrow. He should be in London almost as soon as his letter.

Left alone with Mrs. Dalton, Marian looked straight at her with a gaze of simple despair. The never-to-be-dispirited woman knelt in front of her pale companion, took her hands, and bade her hold up. She was going to England, she said, solely on Marian's account. They would gain their point yet. Should she tell Marian her scheme? No; she had better not. Marian was unfit, and indeed far from anxious, to be participator in any more plans. She had had quite enough of them.

‘You little faint heart! Then I will not tell you what I am going to do.’

‘No; don’t.’

‘Very well. But keep up your spirits and believe in me; and you will see that when, if not before, I return, all will be right. And I am sure

you will take good care of—my baby, the short time that I am away.’

‘Yes,’ answered Marian, mechanically. ‘Only I know that all you or everybody could do will be of no use.’

The morrow came. This time Mortimer would not be away more than four or five days at most. Mrs. Dalton said that very likely she should not be able to return so soon as he, if he were to be in London only that short time; but she should be quite sure to be back in a week or ten days. This time, too, Marian would be at home, and would have Florence to amuse her. And then, at the end of his absence, what a prospect to look forward to.

But all he could say was of no avail in cheering her. Never, it seemed to him, had there been less reason for her being downcast; and never before had she looked such a picture of misery. She might at least, like the wife of old under conditions infinitely more trying, have smiled through her tears. But there were nor tears nor smiles. There was only a steadfast stare of unmitigated wretchedness.

But there was no more time for words, even of

comfort. He must go now. Again he bade her cheer up, and think of his coming back. Again he blessed her and kissed her, and kissed her again, but left her utterly uncheered. Never mind ; it would be all right when he returned, and once they crossed the mountains. With such confirmed hopes, at length he left her.

Entirely alone. Jeannette, jealous from the outset at Marian's coming to be the mistress of Monsieur's household, though too prudent to betray her jealousy to him, had never been able to warm to the young wife. It seemed to Jeannette that marriage merely increased Monsieur Dyneley's labour and expenses without increasing his happiness, and she objected to it accordingly. She had been with Mortimer so long and had grown habituated to consider his personal interests so exclusively, that whatever seemed to clash with her view of promoting them, at once excited her passive resistance, if she dared not venture on open opposition. She had, however, remained an active, thrifty, and intelligent domestic ; and though Marian did not share Mortimer's enthusiasm for her excellent qualities, she was just aware that Jeannette was of

considerable use. But in her eyes Jeannette had never been more than a good servant; and between them was no touch of that laudable familiarity such as often subsists between mistress and maid.

Entirely alone. Little Florence lay creased and crumpled up in her cradle. But *whose* Florence? Not Mortimer's and not hers. Comfort in the pretty slumberer! It was the crowning burthen of her woe. It only the more suggested what might have been, whilst it drove straight in upon her mind what was. Grace Dalton had still talked of hope. She would probably have done so on the scaffold. Hope, there was none, now. Four days more, and Mortimer would return, bent upon immediate departure for Italy. Even were there any motive for longer maintaining the now detestable deception, it could not be maintained. No object was to be gained by further dalliance. She did not want the child; she hated the—No; she did not hate the poor little innocent; but why had it been thrust upon her in the midst of her misery, only to aggravate it? Would that she had never seen it, or its deplorable mother! Did she hate Grace Dalton? No—she could not or would not hate

her; but she did not love her now, and wished to Heaven she had never been involved in her inextricable toils. Not inextricable, surely? For they would have to be broken through, and at once. Even if she herself were willing to still longer preserve a wretched silence, in order longer to stave off a yet more wretched avowal, Mortimer's plans forbade any such continuance of deceit. He certainly would not hear of Mrs. Dalton accompanying them to Italy. That would be equivalent to establishing her permanently in their household. And even supposing, what was more than improbable, that he could be induced to agree to such a course, Mrs. Dalton herself could not, however much she wished it. Her husband would shortly return; and what then? Turn it which way she would, the same terrible, plain conclusion was the result of her dreary meditations. She had consented to a shocking deception upon her husband, and very soon he must know it.

She *could not* tell him. What would he think of her then? He would never comprehend the physical state and mental madness combined which had led her up to the acceptance of so direful a scheme. If he had never yet in the slightest

degree understood her real reasons for ardently desiring their settlement in England, consequent on renewed amity with his cousin, how would he be likely to catch a glimpse of the subtle but profound moving causes which had made her clutch at an otherwise inexcusable means for bringing such to pass. What would he think of her, when he knew it? Would he not compare her with that other one, that indefinite dream, that halo-encircled memory—with her who had borne all but never wronged him? All her own influence over him, little as she thought it had ever been, would be gone for ever, and the other influence would silently dominate him through every year to come.

Then she went through all her old bitter thoughts, conjured up every word, look, argument which could bear or be twisted to bear upon her immaterial but therefore all the more ineradicable mistrust. To such a pitch of madness had she wrought herself, that moral judgment was as confused as every other. She would find further food for her jealousy, she cared not by what means. She *would* know all that could be known. And even if her attempt succeeded in providing for her no fresh aliment for

misery, at least it could provide her with no consolation. One drawer, and one drawer alone of his, she had never seen him open, and never known unlocked. Its contents she would know. There was no need for force. All the drawers of his *escritoire* were locked at present, but the keys lay frankly tumbled together on his dressing-table. She took them up. She knew which drawer she wanted to open, without trying any of the rest; the only delay was in discovering its right key. After much blundering, made worse and longer by her hot excitement, the lock turned at last. She was disappointed. There lay quietly in the drawer only a solitary letter. She opened it. She was not disappointed now. It was long and was signed at the end by Isabelle. She devoured it with eyes of flame, reading straight on to the close, and then commencing it again.

It will probably not have been forgotten; and if it be not as fresh in the memory as I should be glad for it to be, it can be turned to at the page where it is fully transcribed. The time and circumstances which prompted it are already known; and we who know them, read the letter with the

light upon it which they cast. Marian read it only in the cruel light of her own unbridled imagination. Nothing to her that it was written long before a word of love had passed between her and Mortimer. Nothing to her that never a word had been written by the same hand since. Nothing to her that this very drawer contained no other single relic of any sort connected with the past. Enough for her that there was the letter in black and white, a letter from Isabelle to her husband.

And its contents! Every beautiful sentiment, every noble syllable of splendid courage, went home to her like a stab. The letter opened with a confession of the influence of his presence, and the influence of hers upon him, and went on to avow that it was only the presence, the proximity, that must be evaded. The very passages which had strengthened Mortimer and which he had dwelt upon as glorious lessons of conduct, were the very passages which smote her to the heart. Did they not actually corroborate her view of Mortimer's state of mind? Why, the very letter counselled, indeed commanded, the precise mental attitude which had all along been her prevailing grievance. 'Were

I,' the letter said, 'in order to prevent whatever is pernicious in either influence, to stoop to the counsels of vulgar opinion . . . I should write of the by-gone days as *a period of foolish dreaming from which it was time for both to awake*. I should desecrate the past in order to secure the future . . . I cannot consent to degrade you or myself so far. . . . I have no words of affection to recall, no dream to dissipate, no illusion to despise. I loved you, and you loved me, and I thank God for it. *Our past must be eternally sacred.*' Where, she thought, bent in concentrated agony over the eloquent pages, where could there be found more complete justification of her complaint? Had not Mortimer obeyed these injunctions to the letter? and was not his obedience the very source of her anxious and miserable discontent? He had refused, in spite of her but in submission to Isabelle, to 'awake from a period of dreaming.' He had indeed treated the past as 'eternally sacred.'

But they were to meet no more. Why? 'That I still love you is the cause of my resolve. . . You must—you shall—never come nearer till Time shall have sobered our emotions.' Ah! here—and not

in any sense of outraged dignity or permanent cause of quarrel with his cousin—resided the secret of his unchangeable refusal to renew the acquaintance for which she had so often and so earnestly pleaded. Time had *not* ‘sobered his emotions.’ Time had only intensified them. She could trust him—was only too anxious to trust him, in Isabelle’s society. But he thought he could not trust himself. No wonder. He had not awoke from the dream; and he nowise wished to awake from it. The motive of his refusal was too clear. She had never been mistaken. Mortimer was not really her husband, but an inhabitant of the past.

The sentences that followed, sentences of beautiful comfort and solicitous advice vexed her by their very beauty and the fidelity with which he had adhered to their admonitions. They spoke of ‘too-pleasant colloquies.’ Ah! such as *she* had never had. Mortimer had never indulged in such with *her*. And yet, what wonder? The hours, days, months, spent in the society of composition alone, which she had so much begrudged, the letter urged upon him as his ‘destined career.’ In this too he had but been the writer’s unquestioning disciple.

She had inquired into his 'tastes, capacities, and inclinations.' She humoured, she approved them; she urged upon him their cultivation. In absence, she had been his one only guide. He might well have clung to his poems, might well have gone over to England about them, might well still look forward to the prospect of their publication. It was all part of the 'dream from which he was not to awake.'

But there was worse to follow. Hitherto Marian had never imagined that Mortimer had been led to marry her except by her poor father's frankness, and his own pity for her desolate condition. But mercilessly before her was proof that he had married her out of obedience to Isabelle. 'I declare,' ran the plain, earnest words, 'that not only shall I be content for you to accept whatever opportunity of domestic love and comfort the future may present to you, but I urge such upon your acceptance with all the fervour of my soul. The motives for my desiring it are founded exclusively upon your interests; but I can press it upon you with arguments founded exclusively on mine.'

So the full truth was out at last. She had

imagined every possible thing she could imagine, and she had not really imagined the worst. He had married her—that is, he had ‘accepted an opportunity of domestic love and comfort,’ which had been *presented* to him, moved thereto by arguments founded exclusively on Isabelle’s interests, and what Isabelle told him were his !

Thus in her madness did she torture perhaps the noblest letter ever penned. But she had not yet extracted from it all the possible mischief. It was dated, and was evidently written, after his visit to England in that August when he had promised to go with her to Saint-Etienne, and had broken his promise by his journey across the Channel. Well did she remember his return, and how changed he was even from his not-over affectionate manner before it? He had come back, and for days positively avoided her, and her father too. Then she remembered the occurrence on the bench when she had asked him if he was offended with her, and she had been unable to refrain from tears. As closely as she could remember, this letter must have arrived that very day ; and its concluding advice explained the alteration in his behaviour which

began and continued from that day forwards, just as the interview in England, to which the letter at its outset mysteriously alluded, accounted for his special coldness and disregard immediately on his return from it.

Again she read the letter, and again. Every fresh perusal only confirmed her construction. She was blind, she was mad. She had sought diligently for ruin, and she had found it.

Meanwhile Mortimer was crossing the Channel, and at length parted with Mrs. Dalton, who had accompanied him as far as the opposite shore. She would not be able to return with him, but trusted to reach Caen a few days after he did, at the latest. His business was very soon transacted. He saw the managers of the daily paper, and after very brief colloquy, had made to him an offer which he at once accepted. He was to go to Italy at once. Once there, he must exercise his discretion as to choice of residence. He would probably find it necessary, for the purposes of his office, to move about from city to city, and from province to province. After every travelling expense was paid, he would have from this source a clear income of four hundred pounds.

He spent but another day in London in making purchases for his wife, his child, and himself, and was then and there ready to start back to France.

Of course he saw Guy Bracebridge. It is much easier for the mouse to help the lion than for the lion to help the mouse. The lion, liberated by the mouse, becomes a lion : the mouse, liberated by the lion, remains a mouse still. Mortimer felt and said that he owed most if not all of his good fortune to Guy. What could he do for him? Money Guy would not take, and more employment Mortimer could not get him. He had done everything in his power to get something of Bracebridge's inserted in the magazines to which he himself contributed ; but really no Editor could have accepted them. Mortimer prayed that his friend would always tell him if the slightest opportunity for forwarding Bracebridge's interests should arise. All right, said poor Guy. Such opportunities never did and never would arise. He was still the unluckiest beggar in the world. 'That fool his father,' and 'that scoundrel his brother,' had been the ruin of him. The ruin of him. But he would hold on, that he would, by the teeth. By the teeth. But it was desperate

hard work : the devil, simply. Simply. Oh ! he was going to the dogs ; he knew that, and had known it some time. But there were heaps of fellows in the same plight. The same plight. And then he laughed as though life were the jolliest thing in the world, instead of being, as he declared it, ‘a beggarly business all out, a beggarly business.’ He had not seen Horncastle ; but fellows said that he was in Holland, dodging about some Railway Concession. Such nonsense. As if any railway would be conceded to him or to anybody mixed up with him. Chances of making money were given only to fellows who had money already. And Horncastle had only debts. But Horncastle *had* had chances, though he did not think much would come of them ! Ah ! some fellows had chances. He never had. Never. And that was all about it . . . Well, Mortimer would write from Italy, and for the present good-by, and better luck to the sound-hearted old friend whom he hoped to reward some day.

It was the commencement of the year 1845, when Italy was beginning to betray manifestations of that great movement which has never since

ceased, and which, once defeated, has at last been victorious, and is now but little short of being completely triumphant. Two very different but really co-operating agencies were at work within the limits of that long insulted and bewildered land. Mazzini was arousing the generous passions of youth by the noblest and most eloquent teaching, and Cavour was convincing the older and more sober that Italian unity was more than a dream. It was at this very date that he, who afterwards was to prove himself the greatest statesman of modern, and, perhaps, of any times, was writing in the '*Revue Nouvelle*,' in an article on Italian Railroads, the following prophetic passage:—'Everything then demonstrates that we are tending to a more prosperous future. This future, for whose coming we earnestly pray, is the attainment of national independence: that greatest of all blessings, which Italy can obtain only by the combined efforts of all her children, but, without which, we cannot look forward to any substantial or permanent amelioration in her condition, or to any secure advance in the career of progress. This is no dream, the result of no indolent musing or exaggerated enthu-

siasm. It is a plain truth, capable of rigorous demonstration.'

And so the article continued, laying down propositions, all of which its writer might thank God that he lived to see more or less established. But with most foreigners as yet, such words *were* the voices of a dream, desires not insight, noble, but impolitic. But the managers of the daily journal which was now to give scope to Mortimer's energies and Italian proclivities, were alive to the change which others overlooked or were determined to ignore. They were gratified to meet with one whose knowledge of the country, its language, and people was intimate, and whose faith in its future outstripped even theirs.

Mortimer was delighted with the responsibility cast upon him, and the improvement in every concern of his life which it induced. He yearned to be at Marian's side, to kiss his little Florence, to tell the mother of his good fortune—greater considerably than he had anticipated—and to be journeying with them both, sweetly southwards to the land he loved. The unhappy past was beyond his power. He trusted that Heaven would be good to Isabelle

—for *he* could do nothing. He had not heard of her at all; he had not inquired; he did not dare inquire; he hoped the best, and strove to think of it as little as possible. He could think only of wife, child, Art, and Italy. The first would be completely transformed by the change; the second would thrive in the gentler atmosphere; the third would be instructed, and might now be justifiably resumed; the fourth he would assist by his pen in the glorious work of her certain emancipation. They would go first to Florence. Oh! how he longed to be there! like its great poet in exile,—

‘He envied every dove her nest, and wings
Which waft her where the Apennines look down
On Arno. . . .’

It was twilight when he reached Caen. With what speed he hurried to his home! Jeannette welcomed him, and brought lights.

‘Where is your mistress?’

‘I don’t know, sir!’

‘Don’t know! Is she not in?’

‘No, sir.’

‘When did she go out?’

‘The day after you left.’

‘What! Do you mean, she has not been here for the last three days?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And the baby?’

‘Is asleep, sir.’

‘Where?’

‘In your room.’

‘Is that all you know?’

‘All, sir. But—there is a—er—er—letter on the table, sir.’

He followed Jeannette’s finger. He tore the letter open. Jeannette slunk away. He read:—

‘I FLY from what I am unable either to endure or to amend. You will probably think that you now owe me nothing; but if you will yet grant me a favour, it is that you will not attempt to pursue me. I think I have made discovery impossible; and if, in spite of my precautions, you were to find me, you would but grasp a shadow. Think yourself fortunate in being rid of one who has failed to make either you or herself happy. Forget me, if you can. If you cannot, be as lenient in your thoughts

as you ought to be. Our union was an error ; our separation is for both an escape.

‘I have taken with me the bonds which were my father’s ; not that I have any right to them, or that I at all want them. I take them only the more to satisfy you that I cannot fail to be provided for, and so to induce you to refrain from a pursuit, probably hopeless, and certain to be without result.

‘All the rest, Mrs. Dalton will explain—I cannot. I sincerely wish for your happiness.

‘MARIAN.’

A sense of intolerable outrage came upon him. Mrs. Dalton explain ! What was there to explain ? Nothing. Was this all that was due to him ? Was this — ? He rushed to his room. There lay the little abandoned, calmly but audibly sleeping. He snatched it from its crib.

‘My babe ! my pet ! And she could leave *you* ! I then will be to you double parent. I will be your whole comfort, and you be wholly mine. I will live with you—for you. *You* will never desert me.’

Rudely surprised in its baby dreams, the little thing seemed too bewildered to utter a cry. At last,

a tiny smile dimpled its lips and chin, and it dropped its pretty head upon his shoulder, closing again the roughly-opened eyes. He relaid it in the cradle, and rocked it back again into untroubled slumber. But long after the baby-breathing proved the deepness of its rest, he knelt, with his lips close against its tightly-closed little fist. At last he rose, and rang—

‘Jeannette! to-morrow I start for Italy! Will you go with me?’

‘Yes, sir. You know I will go with you anywhere.’

‘As nurse?’

‘As everything.’

‘Good. Then we go—to-morrow.’

END OF PART II.

PART THE THIRD.

COMPLIANCE.

CHAPTER I.

EVERYBODY who is ever likely to read this book, will be able to recall how summer came upon us in this year of grace 1864. Through April and early May, winds had been cold, and leaves laggard, when sunshine, blossom, and soft sensuous airs burst suddenly and simultaneously upon our impatient and delighted nerves.

At this very period, down one of the quieter lanes which approaches Richmond Park from Roehampton, a man was leisurely riding, subdued into the slow pace, not usual with him, probably by the exquisite fresh greenery and variety of scented bloom to which he had lately been quite as little accustomed. Whilst thus pleasantly inhaling sights and perfumes which yet remained a material part

of his vital joy, he was ridden past by a man whom, though trotting rapidly, he saw clearly enough to think to himself—

‘ I am sure I have seen that man before.’

Though keeping the face before his mind all the more convinced him that he was not mistaken, it did not enable him to recall the place and circumstance of former acquaintance, and thus arrive at personal identification. The man reined in his horse when he got a little in front, and was now riding as leisurely as himself. So he broke into a trot, stared hard at the other as he passed him, exclaimed—

‘ Now I know ’—

and pulled up.

‘ You do not remember me ? ’

‘ Pardon me,’ said the other ; ‘ I do not, in the least.’

‘ Your oblivion is very pardonable. You never saw me but once, and that once twenty years ago. I was young, and am no doubt considerably altered. You were much older, and so have changed less. Besides, you were exceedingly kind to me.’

‘ I am very glad to be reminded of any kindness

performed twenty years ago: it reconciles me to age. But, even still, I completely fail to recognize you.'

'Do you remember a young man, of about seven-and-twenty, submitting to you for publication a volume of poems, called—'

'Mr. Dyneley!'

'Yes, Mortimer Dyneley.'

'You are altered, indeed; but your name, and indeed my interview with you, I have never forgotten. I have often wondered what had become of you. Did you not, shortly after our only meeting, go to Italy in the capacity of correspondent of a London daily paper?'

'Yes, I did; and there remained for twelve years. Indeed, till the end of the Crimean war, in 1856. I was in Italy during all the hopes of 1848, and their pitiable termination. Thank God! I return to Europe to find her almost now—what before long she shall be entirely—one and free.'

'You have been out of Europe, then, during the last eight years?'

'Yes, in the East. I have only just returned.'

'I have looked in vain for your poems, which, I

assure you, I never forgot. Did you ever publish them ?'

'No, indeed; and never shall. Even at the time when I wished to do so, and was restrained only by want of means—a restraint that has long since ceased to exist—I was implored by a very long-headed old French cynic to believe that the latter half of the nineteenth century and true Art are incompatible.'

'I think he was right.'

'So I do now. Only it was not he who convinced me. We rarely benefit by anybody's experience but our own. His arguments, which I declare I do not very accurately remember, produced on me not the slightest effect. It was in my resumed residence in Italy that I learned—not from the tongues of living Mentors, but from the works of dead masters—the conditions which enabled them to be what they were, and those which forbid us to be better, in their sphere, than feeble imitators.'

'But you never aspired, surely, to be a painter or a sculptor ?'

'No; but the truths concerning the branch of Art which a man aspires to pursue, are best learned

in the branch which he does not. He will be less partial in his judgments, and less warped by his enthusiasm.'

'Yes; that I understand. And you arrived at the conclusion that Art must not, at present, be pursued?'

'Not only that it must not, but that it cannot. What at present goes by that name, but is only a substitute for it—just as respectability is a substitute for virtue—is a very poor affair. To be the Theocritus of a really lyrical age was well enough, though no very grand occupation, since a lyrical age is necessarily but a small one. But to be the Theocritus of a non-lyrical age is to be nothing but a curiosity: a position never accepted save by inferior minds. Great artists, and especially poets, have invariably been doers. The old word may still retain its meaning. Depend upon it, Homer not only sang of battles, but his singing inspired his contemporaries to fight. Dante, besides the direct (and comparatively slight) part he took in the affairs of his country, bore a much grander part in (at the time) forming a language, and even now is assisting to form a nation. He was a mighty doer,

doing the greatest possible thing a man at that time could be sent to do. He stands out in cold, clear relief, a representative man. Milton wrote epic poems, but was in them and out of them a tower of strength against the opponents of Theocracy and Liberty combined. To Shakespeare we owe, more than to any other assignable cause, our intense nationality. Try to think of England without him. It is impossible. Byron was a tremendous doer; a very wild, but an effective one. He struck down shams, enabling others to erect realities in their place. Shelley even, whom most people think of as a dreamer, made religious tyranny a by-word and a shame. I speak of our own countrymen; but the parallel holds throughout Europe. What poet, in our portion of the century, is doing or can do more than gratify sentimental women or wearied men? We may—we probably do—possess among us potential poets of the highest order; but these are not publishing blank verse or other. They are presiding over the finances of the nation, or studiously solving the profound problems of Science. In times when to sing was to do, these very men would probably have

been singing. To sing now is sheer idleness ; but the poetry of Action remains to us still.'

'If I recollect rightly your manuscript writings of twenty years ago, you were irritated with and despondent about the Age, *because* it was industrial and not artistic ?'

'Precisely so. I saw then that it was not artistic, and I was indignant. Now, I see that it is not, and cannot be ; and I am perfectly satisfied.'

'And you are hopeful as to the Future ? Many amongst us—and those of the most thoughtful—are not so. The present Age terrifies them. They think it material and ungodly. But you say that you hope.'

'I do ; but that trust is based on another conditional hope, that the Age will contrive to find a Faith ; to construct one for itself in agreement with undeniable facts. Otherwise, it is lost. The very honesty and directness—in a word, the positivism—of the Age, is at once its merit and its danger. Forms may linger ; since men continue to talk the old language long after they have got into the new country. But the old beliefs have as good as gone ; and the fear is, lest others—or rather an-

other—should not be established in their place. It is a terrible shock for an epoch, as for an individual, to have to abandon the beliefs which it inherited, and which it was educated to regard not only as trustworthy, but as infallible. Finding that the reasons which it has hitherto accepted break down lamentably, it at first inclines to think that there are no reasons at all. Now, an epoch without a Belief is a monster, a chaos, a rudderless vessel, with pleasure only at the helm. Doubtless the wrong reasons convince the smaller and weaker minds ; but they drive the stronger and more influential to utter disbelief. The right reasons would convince us all. The problem is, Will this Age take the trouble calmly to discover them ?’

‘ And do you think it will ? ’

‘ I think it is doing so even now ; so that the only peril is lest it should not be stanch and sound enough to pull through the terrible time of transition.’

‘ How, then, do you think it is to be saved ? By Science ? ’

‘ Precisely. By Science and its applications. I am sure you do not suppose that I have been

speaking exclusively of what is called Religion. I am thinking of Religion, Politics, Finance, Education ; briefly—of Sociology.’

‘No ; I quite apprehended, and indeed agree with you. But it seems to me that the resistance of the unscientific is what resistance has been in every age ; exceedingly obstinate, though made with less heart perhaps than formerly.’

‘Then the scientific besiegers must be all the more patient. Let them remember that they will want afterwards to live in the citadel, which they wish to dismantle. Therefore they must not begin by battering it to pieces.’

‘And do you think they are not doing so?’

‘I think they are not. Let us take two leading instances, the attack upon still supposed infallibility, either of Man or Book ; and the attack upon social inequality. Last century, the first was pelted with foul-mouthed scorn ; and the second with crude abstract theories, and proposals of spoliation.’

‘And the attacks failed.’

‘On the whole they did, and they most certainly deserved to do. What is happening now ? The so-called orthodox cannot complain that the hetero-

dox are not both gentlemanly and reverential antagonists. Your modern sceptic is usually a very respectful person. With regard to the second instance, social inequality, we are passing through the greatest revolution, I verily believe, that the world has ever experienced. It alarms no one, since only a few perceive it. Its operation commenced since I left England ; and its first registered edict, is the Limited Liability Act, now in full play. I quote, as I say, but two instances ; but other changes are going on *pari passu*. Conservative Progress is beginning to be something more than a phrase.'

'But even if Art be now a useless pursuit, because an impossible aim, Literature, still in its less ambitious walks, assists in the progress of which you speak.'

'Immensely. To refer to nothing but journalism, it is distributing the accumulated thoughts of the wise, pretty much perhaps as the companies formed under the Limited Liability Act are distributing the profits of wealth. Literature does most useful, if no longer very splendid, service.'

'And would you not be content to be in that

service? Or, should you still be ambitious of greater things, can you not devote yourself to trying to accumulate what it distributes?’

‘It seems to me,’ he replied, ‘that Progress is sometimes stopped by want of ideas, and sometimes by want of practical and courageous activity. Sometimes the store of thought is exhausted, sometimes the brave ingenuity to apply it is wanting. In all but the higher and purely mental sciences—for useful pursuit of which I really am not equipped—it seems to me that, at present, the latter is the case. In politics especially, if we are halting, we halt, not from want of knowledge, but from want of discreet boldness in utilizing our knowledge. If I am yet destined to be of use, I would rather that my services were rendered to such an object.’

‘And we may yet see you active in political life?’

‘Perhaps. We part here, do we?’

‘Yes; I turn to the right.’

‘Are you still in the same firm, as when you advised me so frankly but so kindly?’

‘Sleeping in it only. I live not far from here.’

That is my address. I shall be only too delighted to see you.'

'You shall do so.'

And they parted.

Dyneley struck heel into his horse, and quickly traversed the turf of Richmond Park. Still maintaining quick pace, he turned away from the terrace, winding gradually downwards to the left; and then swept on till high garden gates stayed his further travel. He rang and was admitted. Under stately old trees, along broad serpentine gravel-paths, past shrubberies in the height of scented bloom and foliage, up to comely flower-beds, and porch guarded by full-blown azaleas, quietly he rode, rang again, and dismounted.

'Is Mrs. Dyneley at home?'

'No, sir! She is out driving.'

'Is Mr. Walter Dyneley, or Miss Florence, at home?'

'No, sir! They are not. They are on the river.'

'I am Mr. Mortimer Dyneley.'

'Oh indeed, sir! Pardon me, sir, I will ring for the groom. Mrs. Dyneley did not expect you till night. I am sure she will be very sorry not to

have been in when you arrived ; but she is sure to be back shortly.'

' Very well. I preferred to ride down from town. I do not suppose my luggage will be long in arriving. It is coming down by train.'

' We will send to the station for it, sir, at once. Would you like to go to your room ?'

' Thank you.'

He soon redescended, took a wide-awake from the stand in the hall, with the remark—

' Walter's, I suppose ?'

—and sauntered into the garden, the opposite side the house, where it slowly sloped away to the beautiful river.

The Dyneley of to-day was indeed much altered from the Mortimer whom we knew. The brown eyes, the brow above them, indeed the whole head, seemed larger than of old ; the mustaches were full, and a flowing dark beard now concealed the jaws and chin. His chest was broader, and his limbs looked more sinewy. His bronzed skin and firm tread, from which youth's dainty suppleness had completely gone, gave one the idea of a strong, healthy man. He was now what when we saw him

last he could not be thought—decidedly handsome. His expression seemed severer than, yet not so grave as, of yore.

‘Charming ; everything charming,’ he said. ‘Not in the least pretentious, but how complete ! without one intrusive feature, but betraying at every turn the tutelary presence of a gentle mind.’

He walked slowly on and on till he came to a little wicket gate, against which an old fellow upon crutches was leaning. The poor aged cripple let one prop fall against the post, and raised his arm slowly and with evident difficulty to touch his hat. Mortimer returned the salutation, looking hard meanwhile at the miserable figure. At length he said—

‘Is it Jeff?’

‘Ay, sir ! it’s old Jeff, hard enough ; old Jeff, as were seventy-eight last We’n’sday. But I fear he won’t be that nor nought else much longer. I’m getting very bad and weak, like.’

‘You don’t remember me then, Jeff?’

‘Why no, I don’t. Truth is, I don’t see as I was used to see. Unless it be Mister Mortimer Dyneley, as missus said was coming.’

‘Well, that’s who it is, Jeff,’ said Dyneley, holding out his hand, which was grasped very shakily by the tottering old domestic. ‘And I am right glad to see you here and alive.’

‘Ar! and I’m glad to see you, sir, since it *is* you; and more alive, I dare bet a trifle, than I’m likely ever to be again—ever again—ever again.’

‘I shall be thankful to get about at all as you do, if I ever live to be your age.’

‘And I *am* thankful, too—I *am* thankful. I’ve a good deal to be thankful for, I have.’ The old fellow began fumbling at his crutches in an anxious, nervous sort of way, saying meanwhile, ‘But—Mister Dyneley—I’ve—another—another old friend to show you—if you don’t—(there—that’s it)’—and he had now got his crutches properly adjusted—‘if you don’t mind just walking a bit round here.’

‘With pleasure, Jeff; I shall be delighted.’

‘He allus were like that,’ said old Jeff (as he thought) to himself, but in reality quite loud enough to be overheard; ‘He allus were; ready for anything, and so civil, like. . . . This way Mister Dyneley, this way. There! Do you know *that*?’

‘It’s the old roan, Jeff, is it not?’

‘Ay, you mind him, sir; him as cast, or as good as cast, his shoe i’ the Chase, last time as ever I see’d you, or you me, sir.’

And the poor old hand again went up slowly in salutation to the head.

‘That I do. And he looks bravely yet.’

‘And he is bravely too, sir! and ’ud do his work yet if mistress ’ud let him; but mistress knows better nor that. Neither the old roan nor Jeff ’ull ever do any more work now.’

‘They have done a good deal in their time, I have no doubt.’

‘P’raps they have—p’raps they have. But they’ll never do no more. I thought it were all right that day, Mr. Dyneley, i’ the Chase; but it weren’t. It were all wrong, as it turned out. I’d a bad time of it after that for many a long day; but it pulled round for me. I wish it ’ud ha’ done the same by you. Likely enough—begging your pardon, sir—you’d a bad time of it too.’

‘Well, I had, Jeff, and no mistake; but you see I have pulled through also.’

‘Ay, ay; we’ve all pulled through, and we may

be thankful ; for it isn't every man, no more than every horse, that gets a light weight to carry like Miss Isabelle and ends his days in a paddock, like this here old roan. Collar work and the knacker's is about the line-o'-life for most on 'em.'

'That's about it, Jeff. Well, I shall be seeing you again to-morrow. I am going to stay here awhile.'

'I'm glad on it, sir ! I wish as I could see you better. But I minds the voice now—I minds the voice.'

And as Mortimer strolled back towards the house the other philosophized to himself,—

'Ar ! if things 'ud only been just the very opposite of what they were ! They say as the world goes round t'other way to what it seems to go. And I've see'd some things so contrairy in this life, that I shouldn't wonder an' it does. Mayhap, it'll go the right way yet.'

Mortimer's reflections were probably more accurate, though not very different, and were speedily interrupted. For he thought he heard the sound of wheels on gravel, and made his way as shortly as his new acquaintance with Merestead permitted, to

the front door at which he had himself this afternoon arrived. Contrary to his expectations, however, he found himself emerging on the lawn, the river-side the house ; but in front of the windows was a pair of light grey ponies harnessed to a basket-carriage ; and patting them was a female figure which, though her back was towards him, he could not be mistaken in ascribing to her who once was Isabelle Chesterton. He walked across the silent turf, getting nearer and nearer, still unperceived. She was dressed in black silk, with a black lace cape upon the shoulders, which yet retained their character of grace. Her lavender-coloured gloves and bonnet-strings, alone broke the sobriety of her dark apparel, except that a tress of the hair still golden had crept from under restraint and glimmered in the sunshine. Still she moved not, but stood stroking and talking to her ponies. The groom touched his hat and evidently said something. Instantly, she turned.

‘ Mortimer ! Oh ! how glad I am to see you ! ’

Their hands met and remained closely clasped. Tears shook into her eyes, and for a moment he stood steadfastly silent.

‘Not more than *I* must be ;’ he said at last. ‘I come before my time.’

‘I did not expect you before night ; but you know you could not come a moment too soon.’

‘And I have not come too late, I trust, to be regarded as anything more than a stranger.’

‘That could never be. Twenty years are a long time, but—they have gone, and *you* are here.’

Again their hands met warmly ; and that was all.

‘Have you seen Florence ?’

‘No : she is on the river, I am told, with Walter.’

‘She often accompanies him in his boat ; but they will not be long. Shall we sit there under that tree, till they come ? We shall see them arrive ; they land just below where you see the lawn dips. How long have you been here ?’

‘Only about half-an-hour. But I have already seen two old friends, old Jeff and the roan.’ They looked at each other and smiled ; with a smile that, if not entirely of joy, was tinged with only a gracious melancholy.

‘But tell me of Florence. Is she well ? Is she pretty ? Is she good ?’

‘Yes, she is all three, more than all three. I thought her delicate at first ; but that, she has quite outgrown. That she is more than pretty—that she is singularly beautiful, you will soon see for yourself. And good ! She is the most genial, amiable, thoughtful girl I ever met or heard of. Believe me, I love her as my child. Was it in France that you adopted her?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, looking askance as he did so ; ‘and until I sent her from Italy to you, she was the comfort of my life. You cannot imagine—or yes, perhaps you can—the pang it was for me to part with her, even to send her to you. But what was I to do ? I could not well take her to the East with me. Besides, it would have been injurious both to her health and training. Yet what could I have done, had I not had you to fall back upon ? Your kindness in accepting, without inquiry or demur, a charge thus inflicted upon you, I can neither forget nor repay.’

‘My dear Mortimer, there is nothing to repay. I am in your debt, not you in mine. Had she been a burthen instead of a support, I should gladly have accepted her from you. But—believe me—ever

since she came, she has been the sweetness of my household.'

'I rejoice to hear it. And Walter?' As he spoke, he turned his eyes away from her and let them rest upon the ground.

'Well also, and also good. He is an excellent son; and may turn out, I think and hope, a distinguished man.'

'Steady, Floy, steady. Left, just a little; that's it.'

And close upon the voice, a boat shot into view, and drew up at the margin of the lawn.

'Here they are.'

'Come, Walter, did I not do better to-day?'

'Well, Floy, perhaps you did steer a shade more evenly; but there is still room for—Hallo!'

Florence turned in the boat, and saw the two figures on the grass just above them. She hurried out of the boat, ran up the stone steps, and with a wild 'Papa,' was flushed and trembling in Dyneley's arms.

'But you did not know me, surely?' he said, kissing and stroking her hair.

She was half blushes, half tears, shyness and affection commingled.

‘Not merely by seeing you—but by first expecting and then seeing you here. But it is you?’

‘Yes, darling; that it is.’

‘And am I still to call you *Papa*? May I?’

‘Yes, Florence, darling! still; now and always.’ And he kept his arm around her, she leaning lovingly against a form that not memory of the eyes, but only memory of the heart, made so dearly familiar.

‘But there is somebody else, pet, that must not be overlooked.’ He gazed intently at Walter, who had now emerged from the boat and stood before him flushed into manly beauty by the glorious excitement of wholesome exercise. ‘My cousin, Walter, I suppose?’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Dyneley. ‘My son.’

‘I am delighted at last to make the acquaintance of one whom I must blame myself, or perhaps my fate, for not knowing before.’

‘Thanks, sir! And a most hearty welcome to England, especially to Merestead. With the permission of my mother, I will beg of you to

make it entirely your own, as long as ever you are good enough to remain with us.'

'I cordially accept what you offer, I am sure, so sincerely. I am only too delighted to find myself your visitor.'

'Where is Mrs. Landon?' asked Florence. 'She went out with you, Mrs. Dyneley, did she not?'

'Yes, dear. We went to visit a poor woman who, I fear, is in a very bad way. So much so, that Mrs. Landon insisted upon remaining with her. When she will be back, I really cannot say.'

'Who is Mrs. Landon?'

'Floy's coach,' said Walter, laughing.

Dyneley looked puzzled.

'That is Walter's college slang,' interrupted Florence. 'He forgets that you have been away from England for twenty years, and are not acquainted with the improvements in the language. Mrs. Landon is the dearest creature possible; is she not, Mrs. Dyneley?'

'That she is, Florence.'

'Whom Mrs. Dyneley kindly procured as a companion—'

'Exactly—coach.'

‘Be quiet, sir! as a companion for me, when I had been here about two years, and was, I suppose, getting unmanageable.’

‘They tell you some of the truth, Mortimer, but not all. The fact is, that when Florence had been here, as she says, about two years, I was anxious that she should have some regular companionship besides my own. Nor will I deny that I was glad to have it also for myself. We have always lived most quietly here — have we not, Florence?’

‘Yes, dear, always.’

‘Most quietly. Walter was at school, and Florence and I were alone. So I advertised for a companion rather than a governess. Mrs. Landon was the result. We both took an immense fancy to her, which has only increased with time.’

‘Indeed it has. I love her dearly.’

‘We both—indeed, we all do. In fact, she is quite one of us.’

‘Quite true, quite true,’ said Walter. ‘Mrs. Landon is a capital fellow, and keeps Floy in splendid order.’

‘And Walter, too, sometimes,’ said Mrs.

Dyneley. ‘She will be here, some time this evening, no doubt; and then you will be able to judge for yourself.’

‘Your judgment is quite enough for me; I am sure I shall find her charming. And she is only another of my obligations to you, all of which I suppose I shall discover in time.’

‘Have you seen your room?’ asked Walter.

‘Yes, thanks.’

‘Oh, but I must go with you to it myself,’ exclaimed Florence, ‘and see that you have everything you want. Shall I not, Mrs. Dyneley?’

‘Yes, dear, by all means.’

As with arms intertwined, the tall bronzed traveller and the fair lissom girl walked away towards the house, Mrs. Dyneley looked after them, and said to her son—

‘Ah, Walter! our reign is over now.’

‘Not a bit of it, mother dear! *Mine* is scarcely begun.’

It probably is not, and certainly must not be, supposed that Florence was any other than the sleeping little helpless whom Mortimer Dyneley, nearly twenty years ago, snatched out of the crib

at Caen, and carried off with him to Italy. Nor, because Mrs. Dyneley now spoke of her as his adopted child, must it be imagined that *he* did not believe her to be really his daughter. To this day he remained undeceived. When, grown pitiful by time, he had striven to discover the fortunes of her whom he supposed to be the girl's mother, he had striven utterly in vain. From that day to this he had never heard a word of Marian. He having been abandoned by wife and she by mother, he thought it better that he should forego the title of father, when no wife could be brought forward to justify his claim, and her absence could be accounted for only by a deplorable history which he now only wished to conceal. He thought it better both for Florence and for himself that, though she always called and thought of him as 'Papa,' she should be brought up to believe herself not his real, but his adopted, daughter. In this character he had sent her to England; and this character he still intended her to maintain. Jeannette alone knew (or thought) differently; but poor Jeannette had died in Bologna, eighteen months after their arrival in Italy.

But, it may wondered, did he never hear of Mrs. Dalton? Did she not pursue him, undeceive him, and demand her child? She did not. We are driven to conjectures; conjectures which naturally arise, and which will perhaps be made clearer before this book be closed. For the present, we can abstain from pursuing them.

At any rate, the puny weakling born in the hotel at Hâvre, had fallen into tender hands, had fared happily, and thriven as gloriously as parent, real or supposititious, could desire. Yet in the last of her golden teens, she moved with all her beautiful youth about her, and all the visible promise of the yet more splendid womanhood to come. Love seemed her instinct, and to be loved her fate. There are some girls whose very recklessness, whose generous prodigality of smiles and spirits, without thought either of to-morrow or to-day, enables them to win all whom they meet, without possessing either true amiability or singular virtue. But Florence was not one of these. It could not be said that she strove to win those with whom she came in contact, since her amiability and faultlessness seemed as much part of her growth as her

height or the colour of her eyes. And her pleasure seemed to reside rather in her own affection for others than in their affection for her. Girl more unselfish never, to use Mrs. Dyneley's phrase, sweetened a home.

Dinner was over. Dyneley and Walter were still sitting over their wine, whilst Mrs. Dyneley and Florence had retired to the drawing-room. The windows which led into the lawn were still open, for the night was warm; but the lights glowed within upon a room where nothing was in luxury, but everything in taste. Florence was sitting on a hassock at Mrs. Dyneley's knee, and had hold of her hand.

‘Would *you* have known him?’

‘Not at first, dear; not so much I think from any other change, though twenty—indeed, for me nearly twenty-one—years, are twenty-one years; but his beard makes such an alteration. But I quite recall his face, now.’

‘He wore a beard when *I* remember him. I remember that, because *my* face was often laid against it. But I should not have remembered and do not recall his features in the least. But

then, though it is not eight years ago, I was only twelve.'

'But you have not forgotten being with him in Italy? You used to talk about it so much, long after you came here.'

'Oh, and I remember it still, most distinctly; and how good he was to me, how kind, how gentle, how patient, how loving! Do you think he will love me now as much as he loved me then? I love him more.'

'Yes, Florence, depend upon it. He will always love you the same. He is very true and faithful.'

'Oh! but you do not know—nobody can know—how good he was to me, how sweet, how paternal, how everything! With the exception of music, he taught me the beginnings of everything I know, from my alphabet and my prayers up to my water-colours; English, French, Italian—all.'

'Except sewing, Florence!' said Mrs. Dyneley, smiling, and stroking her hair.

'*You* taught me that. You know I could not sew a stitch when I came here; and you know how stupid I have been. And I believe I was quite as stupid in everything else. But I don't recollect

his ever being cross or impatient with me once. And he always put everything else off for the sake of my lessons ; and in every city it was the same. I wish I had been a little older when we travelled together ; for I have but a very confused notion of all the places we visited and stayed at.'

As she spoke, the door was quietly opened. Somebody peeped in, and then quietly entered. Florence jumped up.

'Oh, here is Mrs. Landon. Mr. Dyneley has come.'

'So I hear, Florence. But I am dreadfully tired, and must go to rest early. I must not stop. If I saw him to-night, I should be obliged to sit up. And really I am too much fatigued.'

'What account of the poor woman?'

'Very bad indeed. She is unquestionably worse. I really don't think she can live. But I will go and see her to-morrow. Now, I must go. O yes, I must, Florence, dear ! They will be coming from the dining-room directly, and I am afraid of being caught and so being forced to stop. You don't know how tired I am. And it is already close upon ten. There ; good-night !'

And she kissed them both and went to her room.

‘I am sure he will like her.’

‘He cannot help but like her. Had you but seen her perfectly maternal tenderness to that poor creature we visited to-day! And just think, she has been nursing her and been with her for at least six hours. She may well be tired. I think they are coming; I hear their voices.’

‘Do you?’ said Florence, jumping up. As she did so, the door opened, and Dyneley and Walter entered.

‘Have we been long?’

‘*Very* long; I suppose it was Walter’s fault.’

‘Not his fault, my darling. He has been giving me more accurate information about the state of parties in England than perhaps I possessed. For though whilst in China I received regularly, and regularly read, your papers, I could not do so on my way home. But I think that during my absence from Europe I have watched the course of events too keenly to be very much behindhand. However, Walter—to use his own phrase (you see I readily adopt your new language)—has been coaching me.’

‘That is just what he likes ; but you have missed one thing for to-night by being so long.’

‘What is that, pet?’

‘Seeing Mrs. Landon.’

‘Where is she?’ asked Walter.

‘She has come home dreadfully tired,’ said Mrs. Dyneley, ‘and has gone to her room ; to bed, indeed, I have no doubt. She has been all day, Mortimer, with a poor creature, who, she thinks, is dying.’

‘How good of her ! The opinion is not in fashion with some modern philosophers ; but I am convinced of nothing more thoroughly than that the most impartial legislation, and the most unshackled material progress, leave us just as much in need of individual charity as ever.’

‘I am delighted to hear you say so,’ broke in Mrs. Dyneley, in the pathetic tones of earnest joy. ‘We want advocates of such doctrines in these fair-field-and-no-favour days, and especially in this house, where Walter believes in nothing but unlimited competition.’

‘It is not a bad thing to believe in,’ replied Dyneley, unless it be accompanied by a denial of

every other principle. Then, unquestionably, it is pernicious. But it is unfortunately only natural that the doctrine should be carried too far by those who are so strong, that they wish for nothing better than to be allowed to settle, without interference, their antagonisms with the weak.'

'That is exactly the case,' said Mrs. Dyneley. 'Habitual intercourse with the weak leads one to a different conclusion, and to see the necessity for some other arrangement besides that of the weakest going to the wall.'

'Then, where are they to go?' asked Walter. 'Are we all to go to the wall together? Life is one grand march, and must not be impeded by the lame or the lazy.'

'Granting that they are lame,' Florence softly remarked, 'for I do not think it is fair to call them lazy, it is surely the height of barbarity to leave these poor stragglers to die of their weakness. Freedom to move, and incitements to move, are, I can understand, noble gifts to those of a nation who *can* move; but they are rather terrible to those who cannot, unless their inability be taken into account.'

She felt she had been led by her benevolent enthusiasm into a very long speech ; and her colour heightened, half by excitement, half by blushing, she went and crouched again on her little hassock, but this time, by her 'papa's' feet. He raised her up, however, on to his knee, kissed her tenderly, and said in a whisper, 'Bless you, my pet ! you are quite right.'

'The worst of it is, though,' said Mrs. Dyneley, 'that there are so many who fall out of the ranks, that unorganized personal tenderness can do but little. Indeed, at present, the pace seems so killing that only a favoured few can keep up with it, and the majority are left unattended behind.'

'No ; *there*, Isabelle, I think you overstate the case. I scarcely think the majority, or anything like a majority, are left behind. Were it so, modern material progress would be indeed worse than a failure. The truth is, I believe, that we must no more refuse to accept and be satisfied with the phenomena of the present, than we must reject all at once the doctrines of the past. Consideration for the weak, and barriers against the excessively strong, must still be maintained ; but Walter's

belief in the virtue of competition must also be allowed. Unfortunately, the adherents of the state of things which happens to be passing away, and the adherents of that which happens to be superseding it, usually regard each other as antagonists. Both are wrong. They are no more antagonists than father and son, or childhood and youth.'

'And you are not afraid, Mortimer, of the modern phenomenon of competition, and of the mania for material progress?'

'Not only not afraid, Isabelle, but I ground upon them my hopes for mankind. Provided always that the restraints—no, not restraints, but corrections, or rather indeed supplementary and co-urgent influences—be not forgotten or thrust aside. I believe that, on the whole, Human Progress must, *in practice*, go through three stages, which, naming them in their order, I should call Physical, Mental, and Moral Amelioration. There may seem to be individual exceptions; but in so extensive an investigation, averages afford us the only safe test. And I think it will scarcely be denied that as social aggregates become better to do, they become better educated, and that as they become better

educated, they become more soundly and safely moral.'

' But moral truths, and a good many intellectual ones, were surely in the possession of mankind long before the apparition of this thirst for material well-being.'

' Yes, Isabelle ; and you only anticipate the very words I was going to use. They were in our possession, but only as accumulated truths, not as distributed ones. They have as yet remained little more than theories, though theories that are not in any great danger of being upset. Remember, I spoke of Human Progress *in practice* ; and I firmly believe that we shall see the practice pursuing the very inverse order to that in which the theories were obtained. Men *saw* moral truths first, intellectual ones next, and material ones they are seeing last. These last, or their result, *viz.* wealth, has, during the last half century, been undergoing the process of accumulation ; we are now going to see its distribution. Consequent upon that distribution, consequent, that is, upon the distribution of physical well-being, will be the distribution of intellectual truths or mental well-being, accumulated long ago.

And finally, consequent upon these two preceding distributions, we shall see the distribution—and by distribution, of course I mean the practice—of moral truths, accumulated before any others, though distributed the last: the most precious truths, the crowning truths: having, as theory, dignified precedence in time; having, as practice, dignified subsequence in operation. Not physical well-being, nor even intellectual well-being, is either the end or the justification of the human race. Virtue is Mankind's highest attainment, but is to be reached only through the prior approaches. May we not illustrate Human Progress, thus considered, by some perfect cathedral? Physical labour lays its broad and secure foundations. Mental ingenuity determines its exquisite proportions, solves the problems of its arches, and carries up its vaulted roof and fretted spire. But Devotion places on its summit Virtue's synonym—the Cross—which was the moving cause of its construction, and is now its practical termination.'

‘But what place,’ asked Mrs. Dyneley, gazing at him with inquiring eyes—‘what place will Art have in this Progression?’

‘It has already taken its place. It has done its service finally. Art concerns itself with the accumulation of moral and intellectual truths; and these remain in Art’s highest manifestations, awaiting the time of their distribution. But Art does not and cannot concern itself with the accumulation of material truths. *That* is the province of Science, in which Science is to-day most nobly labouring,’

‘And Creative Art will address the world no more?’

‘Except in the recorded manifestations which, thank Heaven! we possess. But we must no more expect for present or fresh manifestations of Art, than again to be summoned to the bottom of Mount Sinai, and for God to flash His Commandments in the sight of all the people. God is One, is Permanent, is Progressive. He never blunders, and therefore He never goes back!’

For a few moments there was silence, broken at last by Dyneley, who said,

‘Go and sing, Florence.’

She rose from his knee, went to the piano, and in a voice somewhat deficient in power, but exquisitely true and overflowing with sympathy, sang the fol-

lowing words to a strange though simple accompaniment.

A LAST REQUEST.

Let not the roses lie
Too thickly tangled round my tomb ;
Lest fleecy clouds that skim the summer sky,
Flinging their faint soft shadows, pass it by,
And know not over whom.

And let not footsteps come
Too frequent round that nook of rest ;
Should I—who knoweth ?—not be deaf, though dumb,
Bird's idle pipe or bee's laborious hum
Would suit me, listening, best.

And, pray you, do not hew
Words to provoke a smile or sneer ;
But only write—at least, if they be true—
These simple words, or some such and as few,
'He whom we loved, lies here.'

And if you only could
Find out some quite sequestered slope
That, girt behind with undeciduous wood,
In front o'erlooks the ocean—then, I should
Die with a calmer hope.

And if you will but so
This last request of mine fulfil,
I rest your debtor for the final throw ;
And if I can but help you where I go,
Be sure, fond friends, I will.

Dyneley had risen and approached the piano ; but

no music, manuscript, or other, was before her. She rose and put her arms round his neck.

‘Do you know where I got those words?’

‘Indeed I do not. *I* never gave them to you.’

‘No, but I found them amongst my things when I arrived here. I prized them then, because they were in your handwriting. Since, I have come to prize them also for their own sake.’

‘They are nothing, child. I remember writing them at Naples when I was ill, and a little despondent. They were not intended for music. But whose is it?’

She blushed.

‘Your own?’

‘Yes, mine: but *it* is indeed nothing.’

‘As an outsider,’ said Walter, putting down a book, which he had not been reading, ‘I may be permitted to admire both words and music. Now, I am going to smoke. Do you smoke, Mr. Dyneley.’

‘Yes: I will join you shortly.’

Walter went, and Florence soon retired. The moment she had left the room, Dyneley exclaimed,

‘She is charming: sweeter than I had courage,

lovelier than I had power, to dream. O Isabelle ! if all that I feel this night, in every fibre of my flesh, in every emotion of my soul, could find expression in language, it would be but one large utterance of boundless and eternal gratitude : gratitude to you for accepting, at the very first instance of solicitation, and without the slightest inquiry, charge of one so dear to me, but whom you had never seen, and now restoring her to me—the consolation that she is.’

‘I am deeply moved by your gratitude ;’ she said, ‘though indeed I do not deserve it. Heaven knows—in indeed, *you* know—that had Florence really been a burthen, you had a right to ask me to bear it.’

‘None, Isabelle, none.’

‘At any rate,’ she continued, ‘I should have borne it with a delight which it is impossible that you should not comprehend. But burthen she is none, has never been. She has been the vagrant sunshine of my house, from the very moment of her arrival. Perhaps I was blameworthy in beginning at that time to feel a little lonely. Walter had gone to school, and I was quite alone. Florence was to me an angel from heaven. If, Mortimer, there must be

talk of gratitude between us, it must be wholly on my side, and not at all on yours.'

'Then we will not talk of, though I must still be permitted to feel it.'

'On one point, however,' said Mrs. Dyneley, 'I am *not* grateful to you, but indeed rather angry. It is true, as perhaps you know, that independently of Walter, whose fortune will of course be large, and whose allowance by the Court is now considerable, I am not and never have been in possession of great means—'

'Yes,' said Mortimer, severely, 'I know that now.'

'Still you might have permitted me to bear whatever little additional expense Florence was to my household; since, in all probability, I was more able to bear it than you.'

'Of that I had no means of judging. Had I been certain of it, believe me I would have refrained from sending what I should but too gladly have accepted at your hands.'

'What you have so regularly sent, has, however, all been put by. For Mrs. Landon was equally resolute in refusing to accept it from me. She, like

everybody else, immediately became warmly attached to Florence ; and I am not at all sure that Florence's heart is not even more with her than with me.'

'No, no : that cannot be.'

'Yes, it can ; but do not think it of any moment ; for I have learned to love Mrs. Landon with all the affection, without any of the jealousy, of a sister. She has been of inestimable service to Florence.'

'It is idle,' he replied, 'to tell me not to be and not to show myself grateful, though recompense is out of the question. Your exquisite generosity and delicacy in setting aside for my pet the money that I annually transmitted to England, I can and do fully appreciate. But you will be delighted to hear that it was unnecessary parsimony. Ah ! time was, Isabelle, when, though my wants were few and inexpensive, I was put to strange shifts to supply them.'

'Alas ! I can too easily believe it. If I could have helped you *then* ! It was not indifference that held my hand.'

'I know—I knew—that well. A perverse fate, as I then considered it—a very wise though still inscrutable Providence, as I now in these chastened

years believe—bound you hand and foot the passive spectator of my desperate perplexities. But even in that blind time when I half accused Heaven of inflicting upon my young life a load too burthensome to bear, it did not punish me by withholding youth's commensurate strength. My querulous laments might have been the weakest of prayers, my blasphemous revolt the purest of impetrations, for they were answered by the concession of invaluable gifts, unfailing health and unquenchable courage. I told you in the letter which preceded Florence to England—By the way, had you ever heard of me meanwhile?'

'Never a word, since the autumn of 1843. From the receipt of your letter in that year till 1856, when you wrote from Italy, to ask me to receive an adopted daughter, I heard nothing to enable me to decide whether you were alive or dead.'

'So complete was your solitude?'

'So complete was my solitude: indeed'—and she closed her eyes as she spoke—'my isolation.'

'Enough. Of *that* I do not wish to think. But you remember how I told you in my letter, written as you say in 1856, how I had been

living in Italy as the correspondent of a London paper?’

‘Perfectly. But was Florence with you all those years?’

‘All of them. As if Heaven had not already done enough for me in giving me strength, determination, and opportunities, it sent me Florence. She says I was her preceptor. Believe me, she was mine. In her sweet trust and entire dependence upon me, I re-discovered the secret, worth all other learning, of my own dependence on Another at least as loving and infinitely more wise. If I taught her to read, Florence taught me to understand. And in looking down fondly upon her, I learned to look fondly up to Him, who in making me her preceptor, had retained me as His instrument. Not without momentous messages of deep significance are children sent so helpless into the world. They come more to instruct than to be instructed. If we would but look and listen, every babe brings the Great Secret with it.’

The tears stood in Mrs. Dyneley’s eyes. Softly she answered him :

‘That such peace should have descended upon

your mind at last, causes me all the deeper joy, because, Mortimer, I can but too acutely comprehend your previous struggles. Women, with all their trials, should indeed be grateful that they are usually spared the *turbulent* struggles which often for a time obscure from men the Light that withal never fails to shine. Women's experience may shake their faith in men, only to strengthen their faith in God. Your struggles must indeed have been arduous.'

'The mere struggles for dear life, you mean?' he asked, with a quiet smile. 'At first they were, *very*. But they passed away. My appointment in Italy was good; and by the time Florence was in her twelfth year—'

'When you sent her to me, in fact.'

'Exactly. By that time I had saved three thousand pounds. Belief in the mere possibility now-a-days of Art, in its loftiest manifestations, had completely gone. If I ever returned to my country, my energies would be otherwise directed. But I was now far more jealous of Florence's future than of my own. I saw and recognized the leading condition of life in this our time. The genius of the seraphim,

or the purity of a cherub, will no longer protect man or woman from dying in a gutter or worse, if they have not more solid means for keeping themselves afloat. Where *I* died might be as unimportant as where I had lived ; but Florence could not be left entirely at the mercy of economic progress, or to the rude chances of a material civilization, in which the virtue that is its own reward is not only very poorly paid, but very indifferently protected. I had not, nor have I since, abandoned, and indeed never shall abandon, my protest, both by voice and example, against the ostentatious luxury of our age ; being consoled, however, to think that the cure—*viz.* as I said this evening, the distribution of wealth—is beginning to work. My only object was to secure Florence against having the deplorable alternative thrust upon her of being either the victim of the indolent rich, or the almost more unfortunate prize of the ambitious and scrambling poor. That object has been attained. My seven years' residence and hard work in Eastern seas—work for which I had no special aptitude, and certainly no inclination—has made me the possessor of a sum, small indeed compared by the standard of the for-

tunes of these plutocratic days, but sufficient for the honest purposes of human life. If I died to-morrow, Florence would be safe from the equally dangerous perils of poverty and of wealth'

'I congratulate you sincerely,' she said, 'on a success so thoroughly deserved, and the reward of an affection so true, however much I may doubt if Florence will ever need what you have taken such pains to acquire.'

'Not need it? Why?'

'Well, we will not talk of that now. But tell me—what do you think of Walter?'

'He pleases me much,' Dyneley answered. 'He is gentlemanly, cheerful, intelligent, and enthusiastic. He thinks himself older than he is, and has got hold of the last new errors which young fellows are often so eager to adopt. However, new errors are better than old ones; for they show that the mind which entertains them is open to the reception of new ideas. His faults a little travel and a long life will cure. Let us hope that these will leave him all his virtues.'

'I trust so. After all, I think I had better tell you at once what you are sure to become acquainted

with soon. What I am delighted to believe will make all your financial anxiety for Florence unnecessary, and what I trust you will regard as the crowning recompense of all your labour and sacrifice, is simply this—the seeing her lot united with Walter’s.’

‘What!’ he exclaimed. ‘Have *you* been so blind? My reasons for concealing the real truth from everybody else were indeed sufficient, as you will see now that I shall be obliged to explain them to you. But I did not think that in this matter, *you* could possibly be deceived, and that there was therefore any necessity for telling you the truth in formal words. How could you suppose that, after my cousin’s death, I should have remained away from your side and not have immediately rushed thither to renew the vows and fealty of my youth, if I had not meanwhile obeyed your express injunction to accept any opportunity which the future might offer of domestic love? O Isabelle! Isabelle! you talk of Florence’s union with Walter! It is impossible. We both know too well who Walter really is. Know then, also, what I could not imagine you would not divine—that I am

married, and that Florence is not my *adopted* daughter. She is really and truly my child.'

The room swam before her eyes. Dyneley was just in time to catch her falling figure as she quietly fainted away.

CHAPTER II.

ANDREA and Bernardo Orgagna in perishable fresco, and Dante Alighieri in imperishable verse, have portrayed for us the tortures of the damned, and the Florentine Capella degli Strozzi, and the Campo Santo of neighbouring Pisa, still offer to the eyes, as the 'Divine Comedy' will for ever offer to the imagination, the Southern estimate of unceasing woe. Yet perhaps the more sober Northern mind would be content to contemplate a soul, in this world omnipotent for evil, consciously powerless for good in the next, and the most vindictive judgment would be satisfied to know, that he who had walked the earth as a fiend, lay penitent but helpless in his grave; aware, even through the ceremonies of the tomb, how the evil he had done indeed lived after him, increased and multiplied, and would never come to end. He will go and undo it. He will thrust up the lid of his coffin. He will roll back,

with might and main, the obstructing stone. In vain. In vain. Death interdicts his interference for ever.

Dyneley sate at his chamber window, with his face to the still summer night, but with his mind plunged in the depths of reverie. Such a picture as the above he had conjured up before his imagination, as he thought of his cousin lying stark in the cemetery beyond. He had been dead these nine years. But the mischief of his selfish ill-doing survived him in plenary, it almost seemed in accelerating, force. When would it be spent? And the river beneath him with its unceasing flow seemed to answer: Never! Never! Never! And so by the scented casement he leaned, spell-bound by the water's alliterative monotone.

But gradually his mind wandered back exclusively to her who, but an hour or so ago, had fainted in his arms. Could it really be possible, he thought, for Isabelle so readily to have accepted charge of Florence, whilst firmly believing that the child was but the child of his whimsical adoption, and that therefore he was still as free to marry as she, by the virtue of her widowhood, had again

become? Of course he had heard of old Dyneley's death, and Isabelle was aware by the letter in which he made the request concerning Florence, that he had heard of it. What, then, must have been her conclusion from his behaviour? What could it be but that, though still unmarried, he had trodden out or indifferently let die every spark of that ardent affection for her, whose inflammatory utterance she had once heard burning on his lips? She was then, at the period of his request, but a year or so over thirty, and he yet wanted as much from being a decade older. Why then did he not seek her? Indeed, why did he not rush to her side? Why did he not at last seize the opportunity of a union which no power nor intrigue could now countervail? Such questions he had felt sure that she would be certain to ask herself, and that in Florence she would find an ample reply. She would give him credit, he had believed, for some good motive in calling Florence his adopted daughter, and for wishing to conceal from Florence and from everybody her real parentage. From everybody but herself. He never thought that he should deceive *her*. Since for her to be deceived involved

the necessary consequence that she should believe him still unfettered ; and since unfettered but silent, therefore at length grown indifferent and unloving towards *her*.

And she had believed this ! That, without the intervention of any other bond, twelve years—from 1843 to 1855, the first the date of their final meeting, the second the date of her husband's death—had entirely obliterated his fondness, calmed his passion, and dried up his love ! For nothing went her original affection, for nothing her tremendous and long-lasting sacrifice, for nothing her martyrdom, for nothing—for less than nothing—their thunderstorm encounter and its wild associations. She had believed all this ! And believing it all, she had nevertheless received Florence with generous alacrity, had surrounded her with maternal tenderness, had done everything on earth for her—and all for his sake ! It seemed incredible, but it was true.

‘Merciful Heaven !’ he exclaimed. ‘There are some women who are *not* even “*little* less than the angels.”’

It seemed to be his fate to be, if not the cause,

at least the persistent occasion, of her troubles. This very supposition of his disregard for her, warranted by his absence and inaction when absence and inaction were no longer necessary, must have been to her one pain more. He must explain it to her. He would have done so to-night, had she not so suddenly fainted. She had soon come round: but he had meanwhile rung for assistance; and on recovery she had bade him good-night, and retired to her room. He must tell her to-morrow; tell her of the manner of his marriage, and the mysterious loss of his wife. This last it was that was so bad to tell. This it was that he had wished to conceal, for poor Florence's sake, more even than for his own. If he had confessed her as his daughter, not only Florence, but everybody else, would have asked, Where, then, is the mother? And what reply could he give? Only such a one as would overcloud his pet's peace and good name likewise. To Isabelle, now, all must be told, but to her alone. In her keeping the solemn secret would be safe.

But where—oh, where—was his wife? Where was Marian? As the years, with their quiet, silent

power of obliterating sense of wrong, had passed over Mortimer Dyneley's head, and brought Florence's so high that it could lean upon his heart, he had wholly forgiven the mother, who, he thought at the time, had so unpardonably outraged himself and his babe. But forgiveness had come too late to avail. Conceding at the time to Marian all that she had demanded—and that, as a favour—in her farewell letter, he had then made no attempt to pursue her flight, or discover her hiding-place. She had told him that he would be almost sure to seek in vain; and, further, that if he found, he would grasp but a shadow. Taking immense and patient pains at first, he might possibly have arrived at the place of her concealment; but would he not have arrived to grasp something even worse than a shadow? To his heart she would have been such indeed; but to his hearth she would have been a substantial and miserable reality. Had he not done everything in his power to make her cling to him? Had he not bartered his past and pledged his future in order to meet the sad exigencies of her present? Had he ever shown for a moment that he repented what he had done? Had man

ever stood more steadily by wife than he? Had he not worked bravely and unflinchingly? Had he not even put aside dear, then almost sacred, purposes of Art, lest she should be mulcted of immediate comforts? And she could leave him! And not him alone. She could leave her child and his: leave it helpless in its cradle, and to the outrageous chances of a motherless future. She was, as she said, provided for. Of this she had taken care, in order that solicitude for her maintenance might not induce him to pursue her. Was it not better to let her have her way? He felt too outraged to argue. And with his pretty little innocent he crossed the mountains, and found comfort in the soft, sinuous land, and the every-day more intelligent smiles of her whom, being reft of her mother, he thought it best to deprive of (all but the *title* of) father.

But time, as I say, brought other feelings: feelings of quite easy forgiveness, if Marian only could come back. He strove to find her. But the same years which had made possible the pardon, made impossible the discovery, of the lost one. And with one more arrow in his heart, upon which as upon preceding shafts, he tried not to lean too

much, he looked life and Florence in the face, and strained the thews of will to pull him through whatever else inevitable Providence might be pleased to send.

But, now, again! To-morrow he would have to speak of her, and confess his loss. Oh! if he could find her! Did she even live? If he could but know that she was dead: that she had died, not over-sadly, but remembering, without reproaching, his name! Had he not promised the brave old soldier at Caen, her poor crippled father, that even if he did not marry her, never a hair of her little head should be harmed? He had married her, and her head—. He shuddered. Would it could re-beat upon his bosom! To know that she was dead would not be enough. No: he wanted her alive: for the sake of Florence; yes, for the sake of himself. It was now clear that Florence could no longer remain where she was. He must take her away from Merestead, and make a home—if he remained in England—at once for himself and for her. Yet, what a home now without Marian! If parents and child could at length be united! Isabelle, generous and self-oblivious from first to

last, would rejoice in the event. No *équivoque* need then hang over Florence's head. No—. But again rose before his eyes the picture of the churchyard corpse, the spirit of whose foul misdoing still stalked abroad; and again he heard the river's alliterative monotone—Never! Never! Never!

He tried to make it say something else. At last he thought its burthen changed. He was not wrong. For there was the quiet plash of rhythmical oars in the water. The night was very still and very clear. Distinctly he heard the sound; a moment after, and distinctly he saw the oars. Then he saw the entire boat; and it drew up where he had seen Walter's draw up, when, that afternoon, it had brought Florence to his arms. Perhaps it was Walter returning home from a starlight row. There was but one person in the boat; and after quietly securing it against the stream, he, whoever it was, quietly and confidently ascended the steps and stood upon the lawn. That it was not Walter, Dyneley soon perceived; but the man came walking across the lawn so leisurely, and seemed so little anxious to take precautions, that he concluded one so much at home and at ease must

necessarily belong to the place. His room was already in darkness ; he having extinguished the lights, more thoroughly to possess and enjoy the dusk of the summer night. He drew one of the curtains in front of him and watched. The man came on, and made straight for the window of Isabelle's boudoir, which was on the ground floor, below, but a little to the left of Dyneley's. To the surprise of the latter, the window was thrown open, rather noisily and ostentatiously it seemed to him, as the man approached. A moment more, and the strange visitor clambered up and entered. The window was still left open ; and Dyneley could distinctly hear two voices, one of which was unquestionably Isabelle's, engaged in earnest but certainly not combative tones. This lasted only some seven or eight minutes ; at the end of which, the man emerged as unconcerned as he had entered, and with like leisure and absence of wariness, walked across the lawn, and unfastened his boat. Dyneley watched him pull off, and for a few seconds more listened to the plashing of the receding oars. Then again the river resumed its low alliterative monotone—Never ! Never ! Never !

What could it mean? Was it a practical answer, coming swift upon his questioning, to his marvel at Isabelle's frank acceptance of Florence as his ward, even when she must have supposed that she had the best of rights to reclaim him as a lover, and the best of opportunities to possess him as a husband? Was there a very simple reason for her overlooking and forgiving the decay of his love? And was it to be found in the decay of her own, and its transference to another? She was not married, at least to his knowledge. Even if she were, or were meditating being so, this was a strange way of bringing it about, and a still stranger one of behaving, were it already accomplished. Yet what construction was there left him to put upon so singular a proceeding, the most perplexing ingredient in which was, that though the time of its occurrence suggested motives for secrecy, the manner of its occurrence seemed to scorn, not only secrecy, but all ordinary precautions. Must he reverse all his thoughts, and arrive at the conclusion that Isabelle—Isabelle with the glorious halo—so far from being 'little less than the angels,' was very human after all? He could make nothing of it. He could only sit musing at the window, and

when at last recumbent in bed, lie awake and be exceedingly ill-at-ease.

The only denizens of Merestead who appeared at breakfast the next morning were Walter and Florence. Mrs. Dyneley had not been well overnight: Mr. Dyneley, long unaccustomed to English habits, had his coffee upstairs; and Mrs. Landon had already departed on her renewed work of mercy, of visiting the poor woman with whom she had spent the previous afternoon. Breakfast was scarcely over, when Walter, returning from a turn in the garden, re-entered and exclaimed:

‘I say, Floy, come on to the river. It’s a glorious morning, and we can have a thundering good row.’

‘I should be very glad,’ she answered; ‘but I cannot go at present.’

‘But this is the very time for going,’ he rejoined; ‘if you start now, we shall have the tide with us all the way up to the bridge. By then it will just be on the turn, and we shall have such a jolly pull home, with tide and stream at our back. Come along.’

‘I really cannot go now. First of all, I must

gather some flowers, and that will take some time ; so that you see, I cannot go, however much I should like it.'

'No, I do not. The gardener can gather the flowers, if that be all.'

'Yes ; but who is to arrange them ?'

'Oh, anybody—everybody—nobody ; the flowers can wait. Time and tide, you know, wait for no man, nor woman either, Floy, though she be as bonnie as yourself. Very rude of them, but they won't.'

By this time, Florence had put on her garden-hat, and got her basket and scissors.

'Is nobody else rude?' she asked. 'You will not wait for me any more than they.'

'That's very good ; am I not waiting for you now ? but, really, I cannot wait any longer. I shall have to pull against stream and tide if you do not go at once ; and it promises to be quite hot enough even with only one against us. Mrs. Landon will do the flowers.'

'She is not here, and I have no notion when she will be back.'

'But she can do them when she does come back.'

‘No ; really, they ought to be done now ; and to tell the truth, I would much rather do them to-day myself.’

‘And rather than come with me ?’ he asked, half reproachfully. ‘All right ; then I will go alone.’

‘You are not angry, Walter ?’ she inquired, pausing a second at the window, as she stepped through it into the garden.

‘Angry ? No ; why should I be angry ?’ And he followed her on to the lawn. ‘Of course, you have a perfect right to please yourself ; to go your way, and to let—or make—me go mine ; only remember, Floy, men get tired of being refused things, especially when they are trifles and there is no apparent motive for refusing them, except a morning whim.’

She had already commenced cutting flowers ; she desisted a moment, and looked up.

‘Am I in the habit of refusing you what you want—whether trifles, or matters of importance ? if, indeed, I have anything but trifles to concede.’

He was a little abashed, but was ready with his answer.

‘No, you are not in the habit of doing so ; and

therefore it is that I am all the more surprised, and at a loss to comprehend what pleasure you take in doing it to-day.'

She had resumed her task, and not desisting from it now, rejoined—

'Were I as unjust as you seem determined to be this morning, I might reply that it is scarcely fair to make previous concessions the basis of a right to succeeding ones. It would be more generous to believe that, always taking delight in seconding your wishes, I have some good motive in asking you not to urge them this morning.'

'And what motive, pray?' he asked petulantly. 'Simply in order that you may arrange some flowers. As I said, it is not a motive; it is only a whim.'

'Suppose it is; it is a motive that you might tolerate at least. Of course, I want everything to look nice whilst papa is here.'

She fully expected that her last words would have disarmed him. On the contrary, they seemed to urge him on from petulance to irritation. He answered quickly—

'Surely, I have as much interest, and as much right in that matter, at Merestead, as anybody.'

She turned away, as if to re-enter the house, saying, as she turned—

‘Pardon me ; I forgot. Then I will leave the flowers alone if you wish it.’

He saw the blunder which he had committed, and, man-like, was swift at turning it upon her. He approached her coaxingly, and took her arm.

‘No, no, Florence ! You know I did not mean *that*. You really must be very much in the wrong when you misunderstand me so wilfully. However, never mind. The place *shall* look nice. You arrange flowers exquisitely : but so does Mrs. Landon. She is sure to be back soon, and will be only too delighted to take your place, and have set you at liberty. There.’ And he tried to take hold of the basket. ‘We shall both have what we want by that arrangement. Now, let us go.’

She clung, however, to the basket, and to what flowers she had already cut, giving vent to an impatient ‘tsh,’ which, if put into longer words, would have been—‘Men always will insist on having the real motive, instead of being satisfied with the plausible reason.’

But not wishing to express that portion of her

thoughts aloud, she had to restrict herself to the 'tsh' and the reply.

'But I have not seen papa this morning at all.'

'You can see him when we return. We shall not be away more than a couple of hours. Come ; I will give up half-an-hour for you, and '—looking at his watch—'will promise to have you back by twelve o'clock.'

'Oh ! but I am sure papa would be so much disappointed if he came down and wanted me, and found me gone, the very first morning after his arrival.'

Dyneley had said very justly that Walter was a fine young fellow, but that he thought himself older than he was. The consequences of such a mistake are pretty numerous. But the most prominent consequence is an excessive estimate of personal dignity, and of the absolute necessity of all wishes being complied with when once earnestly urged. Dignity is attained by their being refused. Walter had urged so long and so pertinaciously this his desire, that Florence should then and there go with him on the water, that, slave of the youthful error, he fancied that if he did not gain his point, he would thereby

be lowered in her eyes, and would most certainly be lowered in his own. The experience of manhood is required to teach one how to yield not only with grace, but without diminution of influence. Walter was far from having learned the secret. And other motives were in this instance at work to make him jealous of his importance, and quite forgetful of being gracious. To Florence's last cited words, his answer was monstrous; but it was natural.

‘Very well—very well,’ he said. ‘I see how it is. I was an excellent substitute, but nothing more. I must give place, now. I shall learn how to do it.’

Many girls, without more ado after such a speech, would have left him to learn it. But Florence — gentle Florence — could never be satisfied till she had turned away wrath. Kindly she answered him :

‘How *can* you talk so—absurdly, I was going to say, but at least so—so unkindly? I have never thought of you as anybody's substitute: much less as the substitute of my protector, whom I have always regarded and shall always regard as a parent. There surely can be no rivalry with *him*?’

But there are some quarrels which, though not sought for, are too opportune when they do come, to be allowed to blow quietly over. Such are the *amantium iræ*—‘sweeter sorrow’ far, even than Juliet pronounced ‘parting’ to be. So, in order it would seem to introduce a little more thunder into an atmosphere already somewhat charged, Walter replied more tersely, but more objectionably still, than before :

‘It seems *not*.’

What could Florence do? She had at last been constrained to tell the whole truth : none of which, as far as she could see, ought to have afforded the slightest pretext for offence. So she simply said, turning definitively to her work of cutting the flowers :

‘Well, if you *will* persist in being unjust, I cannot prevent you. But I thought you cared more for me.’

‘Care for you, Florence!’ he exclaimed in a tone that compelled her to turn again and listen. ‘Care for you! You know I care for you. Since things have arrived at this pass, it is better I should tell you *how much* I care for you. Florence! I *love* you; have loved you almost ever since you

came with your childish blue eyes, and your shy little ways amongst us. With your growth has grown my fondness; with your beauty, my attachment. Familiarity has never for one moment made you common to me, nor habit impaired the freshness of my devotion. Constant intercourse has but brightened my earliest impressions, and satisfied my conscience that it may follow the lead of my heart. So that in the delicious freedom which we have together enjoyed, I have come to love you with all the warm fervour of the boy chastened by all the sobriety of the man.'

'Then do not be angry with me, Walter,' she said, with as much calmness as she could muster, 'if rather to the sobriety of the man than to the fervour of the boy, I make answer and appeal. I have heard your earnest words. For the present, I pray you permit me to seem *not* to have heard them, or at least, to seem to forget them. Had it not been for our—not quarrel, but—misunderstanding just now, I am sure you would not have chosen this morning for their utterance. You are always doing me infinite little kindnesses; but I don't think I have ever asked you for a favour;

probably, indeed, because you are constantly divining and anticipating my desires. But I am going to ask you to grant me a favour now, and it is this. Without in any way compromising the future, let us suppose your last words unuttered. Shake hands with me, and go to your boat—but this morning, please, *alone*.’

But his young blood was up. And she might as well have implored a tower that had fallen out of the line of its centre of gravity not to tumble, as ask this boy, now fairly started, to stay his impetuosity. He only went on still more wildly :

‘I do not wish, Florence, to belie the words of which you take such skilful advantage. But you must think me sober indeed, to imagine that the unchained passions of months can be so easily re-submitted to the leash? Is it nothing to have been silent so long? to have had all this while my turbulent heart heaving up to my lips the big, burning, volcanic words, and yet to have smothered and repressed them?’

‘Oh! but I pray you,’ she exclaimed, ‘to repress them now!’

‘No—no, you ask me too late. Can you guess

how long I have waited already? waited for the child to bud into the girl—waited for the more fixed colour to come upon your cheek, for the statelier movement to enhance your form, for the more conscious heart to inform the more cautious lips. Oh, and with what impatience! How often have the eager utterances of an ever restless love sprung up unbidden! how often been rebuked—ay, flogged down by affectionate consideration for your years. At last I have given them liberty; I am their master no more. But do not hint, Florence, that there is not enough sobriety in my love, when I have so long denied myself the luxury of avowing what I will own I have fondly—I trust, not fatally—thought, was by you somewhat returned. Speak to me, Florence! If I *have* cherished an illusion, the sooner that I cast it away, the better for my peace and yours.’

Again her lips framed the impatient ‘tsh,’ and she added:

‘I did not speak of illusions, though you seem determined to create them. I simply begged of you a favour—a favour in asking for which I did not expect to be deemed so very exacting. It is

not for me to throw doubts upon your fervour ; but you surely exaggerate either your impatience or your discretion. What is it that I ask ? Nothing but silence when words are not opportune. You talk of my youth ; do not be offended if I remind you of yours, but only with the object of strengthening my request. Your college career has not yet closed ; the world is all before you, and I know you are ambitious. Grateful as I am that I hold so high a place in your thoughts, I would sooner be banished from them for ever, than from them banish even for a time subjects still more imperative upon a manly regard. I am always here ; and if you will only grant my request not *now* to urge your words, I—I cannot *say* it ; but you cannot possibly misunderstand me.'

Misunderstand her, however, he was determined to do.

' You would urge me on to the struggle of life, and hold yourself out as the reward of conquest.' She made a sign as though he did not comprehend her. He refused to remark it, and only went on : ' And believe me, Florence dear, no wrestling would be too arduous, no battle too severe, which closed

with you as its guerdon. But why wantonly submit me to so long and so painful an ordeal? Is your faith in me so small? Do you believe so little in my strength of purpose and my power to strive? Why not rather ally yourself with me, at the outset, in the noble efforts from which, with or without you, I shall not shrink, but to which, if I have you at my side, I shall bring a fuller courage and a holier aim. Oh! how they circumscribe woman's mission who would keep her in reserve in order to temper the bitterness of defeat, or to intensify the intoxication of triumph! Hers rather should it be to avert the possibility of failure, yet so to direct success that victory do not, by insolence, degenerate into disgrace; to bless the sword when it strikes, but when the sword has stricken successfully, to remind of the cross at the hilt. My thoughts of you, absorbing though they be, do not banish those other thoughts for which you nobly, but superfluously, plead. It is not I who would divorce them. Your lips alone can pronounce so sad a separation.'

'You refuse then to listen to my request, urged with all the earnestness in my power?'

‘Because it is impossible. I have spoken, and you must speak.’

‘If I speak,’ she rejoined, with calm and unmis-takable determination, ‘it can only be to insist on my request, as far as my own silence can enforce it. After a separation of eight years, I find myself reunited to one whom you know I have learned to regard as a father. You choose the very moment of his return to urge what I simply ask you to postpone. If you cannot at present consider *me*, it is all the more necessary that *I* should have some consideration for *him*.’

His colour went, and he bit his lip audibly. Then, trying to be calm in turn, he said slowly but tremulously :

‘At last, Florence, I think I comprehend you ; for from such a silence as you insist on maintaining, an answer is but too easily construed. I do not, you may be sure, value what I have asked for any the less because, as it would appear, it is not my fate to obtain it. But after all I have said, it is perhaps necessary and certainly justifiable to inform you, that what I sought as a free gift, Florence, from your own hands,

I shall never care to accept from the hands of another.'

And with these words, the eloquent and brave but exceedingly young man swept with proud humility away. But as he did so, a lady in quiet outdoor costume turned the corner of a gravel-path, and was close upon them. It was Mrs Landon.

'Where are you going, Walter?'

Without either stopping or turning round, he answered loudly and irritably,

'On to the river—on to the river.'

And without more, he dropped into his boat and pulled off.

'What is amiss with Walter this morning?' A glance at Florence's face showed plainly that something was amiss with her also. 'And you, too? You are quite flushed and trembling. What has happened? You surely have not quarrelled?'

'I scarcely know,' Florence replied; 'I hope not.'

'But you fear so. Come, tell me all about it; at least, if you will.'

'O yes; you know I will; would tell you anything, everything. Walter—loves me.'

‘ And has been telling you so.’

‘ Yes ; and I begged him not to speak—not now. I besought him to be silent for the present ; said all I could to induce him to do so, but in vain. And he has gone away, quite misunderstanding me.’

Mrs. Landon looked hard but kindly into the beautiful young face, fresh with the morning, but flushed with the excitement of the recent colloquy.

‘ Do not answer me, Florence, if you think silence best. But if you answer, answer truly ; indeed, I am sure you will. May I ask you anything ?’

‘ Yes, yes ; anything.’

‘ Do you love Walter ?’

Slowly and calmly, and with monosyllabic tenderness, she murmured the soft, sibilating—‘ Y-e-s.’

‘ Then why is he offended ?’ Mrs. Landon inquired.

‘ Because I would not—could not, at present—answer his question if I did so ; and he tried to force me into a reply.’

‘ You have not let him depart with the impression that you do not love him ?’

‘ I scarce know what I have done,’ Florence

answered, in a desperate sort of way. 'I only know what I wanted to do. Perhaps I was very maladroit; but I wished him to understand that the very moment of Mr. Dyneley's return was not opportune for his declaration. At present, *he* has the first claim upon my attention. Apart from my own attachment, which would of itself lead me to devote myself just now exclusively to him, it would be inconsiderate and ungrateful in the extreme to obtrude upon him, immediately on his arrival, what could scarcely ever be to him an unqualified pleasure.'

'That is very true. To lose you will always be a blow to him. For you to be snatched from him at the moment of your reunion, would be almost cruel. And it is very thoughtless of Walter not to have taken that into consideration.'

'It is most unreasonable,' Florence ejaculated, with half-tearful earnestness.

'Ah! my dear! men are nearly always unreasonable with the women whom they love; but they are not half so unreasonable as the women who cross them in their fit of unreason. Tell me—what would life be to you without Walter?'

‘ Only half a life, I think.’

‘ Then, Florence, you cannot learn too soon to allow him the utmost liberty of being unreasonable, when it is a question of his loving you. As well stem a torrent yet expect it to preserve its bed, as well check a courser when he is making straight for the goal and expect him to win, as think to stop a man in the full onset of passion without lessening the fervour of his love. Love never returns to the assault with half the vigour that animates its first attack. Walter may have chosen the wrong time to charge; but you have been much more wrong to repulse him. With what understanding did you separate?’

‘ With none; except that he seems annoyed and jealous that I should be so much devoted to Mr. Dyneley. And because I showed this, he said that he did not care to be indebted to anybody else but myself for—my love, I suppose. As if he *could* be!’

‘ Then he thinks that you wish him to have his answer from Mr. Dyneley, rather than from you; and that you would not accept him without Mr. Dyneley’s consent.’

‘ I dare say he does ; though, really, I said nothing about that. I only wished him to wait.’

‘ But, after all, is he right in thinking so? Would Mr. Dyneley’s opposition override your love?’

Poor Florence began to look again quite as much perplexed as she had been with her lover. She tried to laugh, and answer quizzingly.

‘ You are as bad as Walter. You will not let me alone, either. *Why* cannot he wait?’

‘ That is all very well, Florence ; and, as I said, it is a pity that he does not wait. But, unfortunately, he has not waited, and therefore you must know your own mind, and be prepared.’

‘ I hope I may never be called upon to decide between two such alternatives ; and I am sure I never shall. It is only that I do not wish my dear kind protector to imagine that the delight I experience in meeting him again, is drowned in a larger joy.’

‘ I hope, and indeed believe, that you will never have to choose between such painful extremes. But, lest you ever should have, you should be ready with a decision.’

‘ And that would be—?’ And Florence looked up inquiringly from under her hat. Mrs. Landon took her hand, and together they sat on a garden-bench hard by.

‘ Have you any doubt, my dear? O Florence! should such alternatives ever be placed before you, do not doubt for an instant. You owe much—say all, under God—to Mr. Dyneley. But every heart, even more than every body, is born free in the sight of Heaven; and no one has a right to buy or sell it into slavery. None, Florence, dear—not even parents—can claim to be protected from its free going and coming and its liberal pulsations, or oppose the powerful privilege of their vested interests to the supereminent rights of humanity and the future. Free choice alone can ever give holiness to love; and the children of freedom must not be lopped of their inheritance. Woe surely awaits that people who, whilst honestly but recklessly craving after public liberty, allow its private sources to be cut off or distrained. Depend upon it that the sacred fire will soon be missed from the forum, when it has once been extinguished on the hearth You, Florence—promise me

that you will never venture on this suicide of the soul.'

'O yes! I promise;' she replied. 'You have quite convinced me; though probably I agreed with you before you spoke. But I pray Heaven to avert so life-rending a struggle.'

'Now, I must leave you. I have only come back for some more port wine for that poor woman; and I must return to her at once.'

'Is she so bad? How I should like to go with you! But I must wait for papa.'

'Yes. And you had better go and smooth yourself down.'

'Do I look excited?'

'Yes, rather.'

'Then I will go and try to look calmer. He is sure to be down soon.'

And away she hastened, whilst Mrs. Landon having obtained what she required, returned to her work of mercy.

Dyneley, meanwhile, was making inquiries how his hostess was, this morning. She was better, he was informed, and would like to see him in her boudoir when he could go there. He went at once.

He asked kindly if she felt any ill effects from her fainting-fit, but did not allude to its cause. After a few more sentences of similar inquiry, he said, abruptly :

‘ I suppose Florence and I must go abroad again. I don’t know how it is ; but the soil of my native land seems clogged with a curse for me. All but driven out of it in my youth, even for some time after my departure the doom of misfortune seemed to pursue me. Twenty years and more have rolled away, and I return to the country of my birth. My feet are not upon it forty-eight hours, before the old fatalities stalk in upon my peace. Is it not better to depart before I am fairly driven away ? ’

Mrs. Dyneley remained silent. Suddenly he added, even more abruptly than before :

‘ I was sitting at my window last night after we had parted, when I saw a man come down the river in a boat, secure it to the bank, and then mount the steps to your lawn. At first I thought it must be Walter, but I soon saw that it was not. Residence in the East has made me rather a connoisseur in nocturnal adventures ; and I was quite confident of being able to deal with him when I became satisfied

of his purposes, and he was near enough for mine. He walked leisurely across the lawn towards the house.' He paused.

'Yes?' said Mrs. Dyneley.

'He made direct for the house.' He paused again. Again, she only said:

'Yes?'

'He made straight for *your* window.' He looked fixedly at her, but she neither changed colour nor shrank ever so little from his eyes. He went on. 'He entered, through it . . . It *seemed*, Isabelle, as if you opened it for him.'

'What seemed so, was so. I *did* open it for him.'

'Am I to say anything further?' he asked.

'Everything;' she replied. 'I will correct you when you are wrong.'

'He stayed and conversed with you about ten minutes.'

'Yes, about that,' she remarked quietly.

'He then left as he had entered, with just the same absence of concern, sauntering away again across the grass to the river.'

'You are quite right in your narrative, which is

now complete. It is my turn to take it up. He is coming again to-night.'

'Really?' Dyneley felt that he had no right to say more.

'At my request,' she went on. 'I fully expected that his visit would not escape your hearing and attention, and that you would thereupon make your appearance on the spot. In this, as you know, I was disappointed; though I own that it was delicate in you not to interfere. However, with the object of attracting your attention more successfully a second time, I requested that the visit should be repeated to-night. It will be made at the same time, and in the same manner. And I have no greater favour to ask of you than that you will take my place here, and receive my visitor.'

'Certainly, Isabelle, if you wish it.'

'That is agreed, then. I do not think you need be afraid of any violence; but it is always as well to be prepared to meet it.'

'That,' he said, 'I think you may leave to me. In all else I will follow your injunctions strictly.'

'You have heard them all. Will you, please, give me the writing materials? Thanks! . . . I am

only writing a few lines, authorizing you to act for me . . . There, that will do. Show them to him as your authority; and, remember, I give you unlimited powers.'

Dyneley took the note from her hand. She rose.

'I shall remain in this room till night; then, it will be at your disposal for the purpose of the interview. But I think *we* had better not meet till after it. Dinner will be at the usual hour, and I trust you will treat the house as though it were your own. Meanwhile, Mortimer, good-by.'

Her words were not unkind, nor even severe; but they were so calmly resolute, that he could only bend over her extended hand, lower to it his lips, and depart.

CHAPTER III.

SITTING within a large double screen that had its convex angle turned towards the window, wrapped in a loose travelling cloak, and wearing a shaggy fur cap, Mortimer Dyneley awaited in Isabelle's boudoir the advent of the expected visitor. On the table by his side was a pistol ; away to the right of the room from where he sate, on a small occasional table, lay the note which Mrs. Dyneley had given to him.

He had spent the whole afternoon, and, indeed, the evening too, with Florence. He had driven her out till almost dinner-time ; and at that meal, no one appeared but themselves. That Isabelle would not be there, he already knew. That Walter was absent, caused him some surprise, though it caused none to Isabelle. She, however, kept her counsel. Mrs. Landon was still attendant on the poor sick woman.

He had been very happy with Florence, no

doubt. But for all that, elements of trouble and disquietude had been introduced so rapidly upon his return to England, that he felt sick and sore at heart. He was doomed, it seemed, never to get out of the shadow of his past. He had much better again accept the destiny of the exile. Florence and he would return to Italy, now politically grown the most interesting, as it had ever been the most interesting esthetically, of the countries of the earth. Certainly, he had returned to England with some hope of taking part in its amelioration. But really, what was there to encourage him? England submitted to the rule of men who, in his eyes, were the incarnation of all that is demoralizing to a community, and in the long run disastrous to a nation. However pre-eminently blessed in many respects, the country still swarmed with evils that are a reproach and a contradiction to the name of civilization. Yet one Minister high in place declared that the best thing Englishmen could do was to 'rest and be thankful;' whilst the Highest Minister of all had just asserted—and the assertion had been quoted as a marvel of wisdom—that 'the art of Government was to leave things alone;' in other

words, the art of Government was, to do nothing! Partly out of unworthy jealousy and partly out of sleek comfortableness, the nation had but some little time before refused to assist France in emancipating Italy, and at this very moment was absolutely disabling France and Austria from snatching Poland from the bloody fangs of her oppressors, against whom it mainly had incited her to rise. Ignorant or indifferent as ever about the real merits of Continental politics, it had permitted the most incapable man—from the very first, a mere Fortune's fool—that had ever presided over the Foreign Office, to involve its honour in the support of a quarrel, in which the side which it supported was almost entirely in the wrong. And now, though still as blind as ever to the real merits of the contest, it seemed inclined to abandon the weak side which it had egged on and which it still believed to be almost entirely in the right. What use was there in striving to co-operate with a people who, whilst so reckless in the investigation of facts, were so decided in their opinions, yet withal were glad to slink away from defending them if some senile stuttering rhetorician could find words to make

them just understand that defending them would probably cost another ‘penny in the pound?’* Such were his desponding thoughts. Let us believe, however, that they would very soon have been succeeded by more wholesome ones; and that, made morbid a moment by the events of the preceding day, he would speedily and permanently return to the cause, in which his whole life had been spent, the cause dear to Cato, the one that awhile seems conquered. He was prevented from pursuing his darker, or assuming brighter, meditations, by a sound which he felt sure heralded his visitor. He sat perfectly still and waited. The screen completely concealed him from anybody entering by the window.

‘Um! not here!’ said a voice, which was distinctly audible. ‘She will be directly, I suppose.’

A moment more, and the intruder was in the room, and walking across the floor towards the little

* What would Mortimer Dyneley have said but two months later, when the nation not only abandoned the weak whom it had induced to do battle, and whom it yet professed to think wholly in the right, but—consistent in its inconsistency—stuck to the Ministry which it unanimously avowed to be wholly wrong, in order that the ‘peace of Europe,’ *viz.* its own comfort, ‘might not be imperilled?’

table where lay the note. Dyneley rose, looked hard at the figure which was now within his view, slipped noiselessly but rapidly round the screen, quickly closed the window and pulled up a heavy shutter. The visitor turned suddenly at the sound. Dyneley returned to his seat within the screen, pulled his fur cap still lower over his brow, wrapped his cloak round him, took up the pistol, laid it down again, and said :

‘ You need not be alarmed. I like privacy, and dislike the night air.’

‘ Oh, I am not in the least alarmed,’ said the other, with a coolness that was evidently nowise feigned. ‘ It is rather colder to-night.’ He looked at Dyneley ; but as the latter was so protected by his wrappings and was, further, leaning his head on his near arm, he desisted from further inspection, and looked calmly about the room. ‘ How pleasant it is to be in elegantly-furnished rooms after the filthy dens one has been accustomed to of late ! In my better days I really did not much care about such things ; but somehow, misfortune makes one a sybarite. And this room is in the most exquisite taste. . . . Can you tell me if I am to have the

pleasure of seeing Mrs. Dyneley to-night? I come by her invitation.'

'She is indisposed, and has requested me to take her place.'

'You know then the object of my visit?'

'Not in the least. But a note on that table will acquaint you with my powers. You may read it.'

He took up the note, opened it and read. Dyneley turned his eyes and examined the man curiously, whilst it was being read, but on the reading evidently being concluded, again averted them.

'The note simply says that Mrs. Dyneley prefers to transact matters by proxy, and will authorize some one to hear me and act for her. I suppose that you, sir, are that "some one."'

'Precisely. And I am quite ready to listen to what you have got to say.'

'But really it is very strange that Mrs. Dyneley should have chosen other ears beside her own for my communication.'

'Strange or not, you see that she has done so; and she is the best judge of that, after all.'

‘True. But I have the greatest objection to speak—indeed I should never have thought of speaking—to anybody but herself on the subject upon which I am here ; unless, of course, she compelled me.’

‘Perhaps you had better regard my being here as a compulsion ; or at any rate as the alternative of saying what you have got to say, as against going away unheard.’

‘But I have already said everything that I have to say, to Mrs. Dyneley herself.’

‘Then evidently she wishes you to repeat it to me. In a word—for you are wasting time—if you do not come to the point, I will open the window and request you to depart.’

The visitor took up the note, and read it again. Then, he said :

‘Mrs. Dyneley’s words are certainly clear enough ; so I suppose I must comply. You know nothing, then, with regard to what passed at my former interviews?’

‘Nothing, I tell you : absolutely nothing. I only know that I am here to listen and to decide.’

‘May I ask if you are a lawyer?’

‘No, you may not. I did not come here to be questioned. Only, as I tell you again, to listen.’

‘It is a thousand pities that Mrs. Dyneley was so unwell last night, and on that account postponed her decision. However, as there is nothing else for it, I suppose I must submit the matter to yours.’ He half-seated himself on the little table, skilfully balancing himself, dangling his legs, and swinging a slight blackthorn. ‘I fear I shall have to tell you a rather long story.’

‘I am a good listener,’ said Dyneley.

‘That’s all right; and to tell the truth, the story is not stupid. I will say at starting, just to try to prepossess you in my favour—though I dare say you will not believe me—that I would not have entered on my present disagreeable enterprise if every other had not failed me. I have recourse to it only *in extremis*. My life, really starting with admirable promise, has been a most dismal disaster. I held on to success long after, I verily believe, every other man living would have let go; for I saw clearly enough that if I dropped from the height to which I had managed to climb, I should probably never recover from the fall. We scramble

up again, after many a small slip or tumble ; but to get well up in the ascent of life, and then topple all the way down again—it is terrible, it is ruinous. My fair start it was that ruined me. I was half-way to the goal at an age when most men are scarcely placed.’

‘ And what may have been the cause of your break-down ? ’

‘ Want of wind — or, in plainer parlance, of money—without which no man in the nineteenth century can run to win. I started without it, but relying upon the companionship of those, or at least of one, who had it. One who was the best fellow in the world, the freeëst hand, the firmest friend. We do not usually love those who are useful to us ; for the sense of convenience overshadows the sense of obligation. But, despite his being useful to me, upon my soul I declare I loved him.’

‘ May I ask who he may have been ? ’

‘ A cousin of Mrs. Dyneley’s deceased husband. And all I can say is, that if he had not been the unluckiest or the most wilfully absurd ass that ever lived, he ought to have been by this at least a Secretary of State, and I quietly revelling in the

Woods and Forests, Duchy of Lancaster, Stannary Courts, Lord Chamberlainship, Lieutenancy of Ireland, or some such lucrative *otium cum dig.*, instead of everlasting dig, dig, dig, with no *otium* at all, and no prospect of it. Think of this! His cousin, old Dyneley, was worth three hundred thousand pounds, if he was worth a penny. He was just rich and an old *roué*, and that was all; but he was unmarried, very proud of his cousin Mortimer, sat himself for a rotten borough, allowed the youngster lots of money, and would have got him into Parliament to a certainty.'

'And you knew this Mortimer Dyneley intimately?'

'Knew him! I should rather think so. Castor and Pollux were not more twin; and often used I to tell him that we, like them, would leave our impress on the Capitol before we had done. It may seem a boyish boast now, but it was a reasonable anticipation enough then. Then, as now, I had not a rap; but I had youth, spirits, pluck, decent looks, and Mortimer Dyneley for my friend. And look you,' he said, holding his blackthorn out at full length with easy familiarity, 'there's just as

much generosity in receiving as in giving ; and I who have always given freely when I had anything to give, let Mortimer pay the piper when I hadn't. We were in fact stable companions, and were entered for the same race of life. I took the start, for he rather required play to be made for him, and rushed at a Northern Borough.'

'But you say you had not a farthing.'

'Yes, I had ;' and he half sneered, half laughed. 'I had a hundred and ten pounds per annum, drawn from the What-do-you-call-it Office. I threw it up—I was obliged, or my election would have been invalid—and rushed away to the scene of action.'

'A rather mad thing to do, one would suppose.'

'Just what you confounded—pardon me !—' and he raised his battered hat, which he still wore, in apology, and then replaced it.—'Just what ordinary people always say. Mad thing ! It was the sanest and best-conceived scheme ever set going. A young fellow, who has real stuff in him, is never so well on the road to success as when he has nothing in his pockets. People fancying themselves mighty

kind and influential, had called on that secretary, written that member, and petitioned that minister, and got me a brutal waste-paper basket to play with, and a beggarly hundred and ten pounds a-year which promised to increase slowly as my hair fell off, so that it might possibly creep up to two hundred and forty by the time I was bald. Mad thing to fling up such a trumpery salary as that! Egad, look here.' And Dyneley could not resist turning his eyes in the direction of the fluent, reckless speaker, who had pulled his empty pockets inside out. 'There isn't much there, is there? But I would not take back their wretched dole even now, except for the purpose of gaining some credit, as I did three-and-twenty years ago, by throwing it up again.' And he struck his leg sharply with the stick, though the words needed no action to give them emphasis.

'You must have been pretty confident of winning your borough.'

'Of course I was, though no one else backed me in my opinion. Even Mortimer, who had large faith in me and who, I must confess, was certainly not commonplace, had his fears. By Jove! how

well I remember reading him a letter from the local agent, saying that I had much better not go, for that I had not a ghost of a chance. "What will you do now?" the old boy asked. "Do now?" I answered. "Why go straight off to-night." I wrote down my resignation, gave it to him to take into the head of my department, was off in half-an-hour, and in another fortnight was Grattan Horncastle, Esq., M.P., and dining with all the swells in Mayfair. Mad thing! Nobody thought it so, I can tell you, when they saw me bowling down to St. James's to be presented. And though now and then a weak-minded washerwoman might beleaguer my rooms, or a foolish fishmonger waylay me on my staircase with his trivial account, you may judge how much concern they gave me when, passing them by with a patronizing promise, I rolled down to St. Stephen's, and amid the cheers of a Senate denounced the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a profligate and iniquitous expenditure. Mad thing! Bah! . . . In an age of cowards and compromise, the brave man surely wins.'

'But you did not win, it would appear.'

'But I ought to have won, and should have

won, but for the foulest mischance that ever befell: a mischance that all the machines and laws of probability on earth could not have calculated.'

'But how were your election expenses paid?'

'Oh, that was a difficulty,' he answered, with supreme nonchalance, 'that never occurred to me then or since, and had certainly nothing to do with my final let down. And election expenses were not then, I can tell you, the modest, hypocritical thing they have become in these virtuous days, when men bribe their constituents with long promises never met, instead of with bank-notes payable at sight, and when a would-be member of Parliament, instead of buying other people's votes, sells them his own opinions. We were less squeamish but more straightforward; and I wish I could see some of the several cool hundreds that helped make me the representative of my free and independent friends. But where did the hundreds come from? How were the expenses paid? Well, the party paid some of them, and Mortimer was let in for some; the Lost Tribes (I am pleased to think) contributed their quota, and the rest—well, the rest, I suppose, was never paid at

all, has not been paid to this day. It would have been, though, if my stable-companion had only answered the promise of his stall.'

' But did not the young fellow you speak of—did not Dyneley then make a start of *any* sort? '

' O yes! and as fair a one as ever was made in this world. But he was a singular mixture of ambition, energy, and indolence: now all for politics, now all for literature, now all for sunshine. The worst of it was, that, let him be on any track you like, a face to his fancy had power to turn him out of his road. Pricked by my success, he was now all for coming to the front. Piqued by an ugly trick played him by his own party—for the planting of which I may indeed take credit to myself—old Dyneley was ready to back him, though the colour of their politics was different, and put him in at the very first chance; when, as the foul fiends would have it, the young beggar at the critical moment tumbled head over ears in love, and went amucker. I waited for him for ever so long, indeed to the close of that Parliament, in 1847; but in vain. I then tried to make the running by myself; but broke down just as I was turning the corner. A

thousand thunders! there never was so rascally a *fiasco*.'

He paused a moment, slowly dangling his leg, compressing his lips, and sententiously nodding his head, as if in calmer reflection over the events which he had been narrating. But as Dyneley remained silent, he resumed :

‘It is not a wise thing for a man to be desperately in love with a woman at any time, until he have married her; much less at a time when he has other business on hand. But it required no ordinary infatuation to postpone the weightier matter to the more trivial, and to fail utterly in both. The woman whom he loved was indeed a wonder. It was no other than Mrs. Dyneley—perhaps you did not know her then?—but her youth, grace, and beauty were enough to have disturbed and distracted Paracelsus in his concentrated search for the chemical Elixir. I shall not forget his showing—what he called his introducing—her to me. She looked half Venus, half Madonna, as heavenly as the one, as earthly as the other. She was more like an early Neapolitan morning than anything else: quite young and fresh, yet quite warm and

mellow. She was more natural than the very best art, and more artistic than the very best nature. I declare I could have forgiven his raving about her, if he had not raved about her just at the wrong time. To love her, must have been a luxury ; but to have been loved by her, a spell.'

‘ And did she love him ? ’

‘ Love him ! There are two ways of making a woman love you—loving her, or loving yourself. Mortimer did both with equal sincerity, and I should almost think with about equal intensity. So it was scarcely wonderful if she gave her whole soul to a young fellow in himself sufficiently captivating. Her parents were devilish poor, but quite as anxious as if they had been rich, that their daughter should make a good match. I believe that at first they did not favour Mortimer’s advances ; but as soon as they discovered that he was high in his rich cousin’s favour, going into the House, and likely to be old Dyneley’s heir, they began to regard him as a very proper person. But before having arrived at any understanding with the parents, though fully accepted by the daughter, the young fool—so proud was he of his newly-found

beauty—must needs introduce her to old Dyneley. Egad, sir! if the old beast didn't fall in love—or in passion, if you like—with her himself. Then followed every foul twist and trick of which human—no, not human but fiendish—ingenuity is capable, by which both Mortimer and the girl were duped to destruction. He was entirely ignorant of his cousin's passion, but was meanwhile, both by his cousin and her parents, skilfully cut off from all communication with her; financial favours and opportunities being heaped upon him meanwhile by the former. The girl was induced to believe that he had been compelled to abandon her out of deference to his cousin, on whom he depended for such favours; and that the only means of preserving to him a continuance of them was her acceptance of the cousin as husband. Worn out at last, she gave way, submitting to a bishop's nuptial blessing, the warm congratulations of her friends, and the cold embraces of a more than sexagenarian!'

‘ Good God !’

‘ It came upon Mortimer like a thunderbolt. Old Dyneley was now only too anxious to continue, indeed materially to increase his allowance. Morti-

mer flung the offer in his face. In a moment, from having an excellent, and the expectations of a large, income, he was rendered penniless, and a beggar. How can I blame him for his refusal, though it left *me* in a false position, into which, but for the belief that I should have had him permanently at my side, I should never have been fool enough to place myself. His fall was sure to be followed by mine. I held on bravely, I think. But the end came. I was flung out of my seat at the next Election. I was arrested for debt. I was—but what odds? I have been trying uselessly to scramble back ever since. I saw it must come to that, if I could not induce poor Mortimer to make the best of what was now irretrievably accomplished, to accept anew the liberal offers which old Dyneley was now more anxious than ever to press upon him, and to find in political success a compensation for domestic disappointment. I would not have given such advice had not my position become desperate. But he was not the man to haggle with ignominy; and I really cannot upbraid him if in his scornful rejection of dishonour, he considered my extremity as little as his own.’

‘Your story grows a little long. You had better

come, I think, to the subject of your visit this evening.'

'I have come to it,' he said. 'A very little more patience, and I will explain all. It was not for nearly a year after the marriage that Mortimer Dyneley became acquainted with the nature of the wiles by which he had been conquered, and Mrs. Dyneley with the real state of his unhappy position. He had been left in doubt as to whether she had voluntarily abandoned him, and she had no doubt that he was well provided-for, prosperous, and making straight for fame. The real truth they learned from each other in an accidental but very lengthened interview. I did not see him after it, though it took place in my own house—a little cottage not far from here. But a friend of his and mine did see him, and that very night. According to this friend—a capital fellow, but a sad fool, and leaky as an old tub—Mortimer seemed half mad with mingled hatred and delight: too fierce to be discreet—too exultant to be cautious. He was then living in Normandy, whither he at once returned, and never came back to England. Mrs. Dyneley remained where she was, and in the following May

presented old Dyneley with a son—the present Walter Dyneley—whom I suppose you know.’

‘Perfectly.’

‘But if truth can be surmised from the world’s ill-natured jests, coupled with Mortimer’s wild utterances after the interview of which I spoke, Mortimer himself, and not that son, was heir-at-law to old Dyneley’s large but unbequeathed possessions.’

‘But has Mortimer Dyneley ever put forward any such claims since his cousin’s death?’

‘No; and the last I heard, or could ever manage to hear of him, was close upon twenty years ago, just before which I myself saw him—for a few minutes, and for the last time—on the quay, at Hâvre. I have no manner of doubt that he is dead.’

‘Well, and if he is—?’

‘In that case, supposing my theory to be correct, his next of kin, or at least, old Dyneley’s, can lay claim to the property. My necessities are imperious; and if Mrs. Dyneley does not think it worth her while to recompense me moderately for preserving a discreet silence, doubtless they will recompense me handsomely for breaking it.’

‘But, supposing still your theory to be correct, yet if Mortimer Dyneley be alive—what then?’

‘Then, as I say, he, and not Walter Dyneley, is the heir-at-law.’

‘And in that case, of course, has it in his power to bequeath, or indeed, at once to make over the property, to whom he chooses; even to Walter Dyneley, were he so minded.’

‘No doubt; but, depend upon it. he is dead.’

‘Then, Grattan Horncastle!’ exclaimed Dyneley, throwing off the cloak and cap, and rising and confronting him, ‘recognize the futility of your miserable scheme!’

‘Mortimer!’ he exclaimed, leaping from his easy, dawdling seat on the table, ‘Mortimer Dyneley!’

‘Yes; the best fellow in the world—the freest hand—the firmest friend—the man you loved; *not* dead, or (*if* dead) arisen, not to vindicate nor to crush, but to stand between you and the consummation of a craven crime! O Grattan! if, twenty years ago, when really I loved you far more than you were ever capable of loving me, you had stood before me the cowardly culprit that I see you now, I should have strangled you on the spot

and crushed you, like vermin, beneath my heel. Now that long years have passed, and that in seeing you I look upon a stranger, and can only just *remember* that I ever loved you, your sorry attempt wrings from me but the paternalest pity, to be transfigured—do not doubt it—into pardon.’ The other seemed as though he would speak. ‘Nay, you have had the word long enough; listen now to me, with far less provocation to interrupt than I who, this night, have patiently listened to you. You say that your life has been a wretched failure, and it is not difficult to believe you. Oh! how many men might be great, if they were not so anxious to be successful! You think you failed for want of money. Believe me, you failed for want of a much scarcer commodity; you failed for want of Virtue. It is well enough for the senile and the decrepit, or even for those who will shortly become so, to put their trust in what commands the market of to-day. *They* cannot afford to wait; they must have their dividend at once. And though errors be but terminable annuities, there are always some which will last *their* little time; and they naturally embark in the errors

which pay the best. But for the young there is only one investment. Woe to them if they do not stake their all in Unrecognized, and therefore as yet unremunerative, Truths! These may be as low as you like in the price-list; probably they will not be quoted at all. And it depends entirely upon the faith and persistency of those who hold them, when they shall be quoted at a premium. Under no amount of discouragement or depreciation, must they barter, exchange, or let go of them; for that is but to depreciate them further. You chose to invest your young, strong, available life in the then dominant and paying mistakes. Their value fell, and your capital was gone. Time had offered to be your friend, and you singled him out for your foe. You have no right to complain that he has left you stranded. Right though I may have to reproach you, I have no wanton wish to be cruel to your distress. But looking back upon the sordid ends of your personal ambition and the means on which you counted for their accomplishment, I inhale from the acknowledgment of your miserable failure a deep draught of human consolation!'

‘ You are right—you are just. O Mortimer! if I could have this failure back! if I could commence again my squandered career!’

‘ Waste not your time at all in idle wishes, and not overmuch in almost equally idle regrets. But no man’s life can be pronounced an utter failure until it is finished; nor, as long as there be in the world a Cause to fight for and a sword to wield, can his opportunities be deemed exhausted. Look around you. A gallant People, abandoned by all except their own unflinching devotion and stubborn thews, are once again striking desperately for Freedom against barbarian hordes and overwhelming odds. It is sadly evident now that Poland will not be emancipated, *this* time. Nevertheless, go and do volunteer battle in her ranks. You will probably perish in the thick of fight; but strike well, and die hard. And in the hour of death forget not to thank Heaven that, though you spent your life in sheer loss and discredit, you are permitted to leave it with dignity to yourself, and with profitable example to mankind. See; I offer you the hand of the man you loved.’

For all his desperate conflict with disaster, Grat-

tan Horncastle had from boyhood upwards known as little of tears as of despondency. But he gave way now. He grasped Dyneley's hand tightly but convulsively; but the choking in the throat would have its way, and his eyes turned traitors at last. The external infirmity, however, soon passed away; and with a voice, if tremulous yet not unmanned, he said:

‘When I saw you last, Mortimer, you were married, and you told me that you were expecting soon to be a father. Were your expectations fulfilled?’

Dyneley put his hand on the other's shoulder, looked him steadily in the face and replied:

‘I believe, Grattan, despite the bitter truth which I have so plainly told you, you never *intended* but good to *me*. Mistaken in your means unquestionably you were, since they were not straightforward. Still I believe you meant me well.’

‘Yes, Mortimer! Heaven knows I did.’

‘And *I* know it. And for the sake of old days, and of the penitence which I am convinced you now must feel, I will tell you what, without much stronger reason than mere kindness and confidence,

I would still tell to no one else. My expectations *were* fulfilled. I was blest with a daughter; I am blest with her still.'

Horncastle shrunk under the hand which still rested on his shoulder, and sighed audibly.

'What is it? Why do you sigh?'

Horncastle passed his fingers nervously across his brow, looked away, and answered:

'Nothing, Mortimer! I only envy you. But her mother—your wife?'

'Look me in the face, Grattan,' said Dyneley, solemnly; and his hand seemed to press on Horncastle's shoulder as with the strength of a torturer. 'My wife fled from me. Did *you* know that? And can you help me to discover her, or at least whither she fled?'

'Indeed I cannot. I did not even know that she had left you. I have never seen nor heard of her, any more than I had since seen or heard of you.'

'You swear it?'

'I swear it, Mortimer! But I too am married, was married even when you knew me of old.'

'So Guy Bracebridge always said.'

‘Poor blundering old Guy! Can you tell me anything of him? Is he living?’

‘He is living and at last more or less provided for. He was of infinite service to me, and at last I was able to make him some return. Well capable of affording it, I found him the means of keeping the rest of his terms and being called to the Bar. He came out to the East; and before I left it—for I have been there all these late years—I got him an appointment which makes him what he deserves to be, comfortable and happy.’

‘I am delighted to hear it. Ah! so it is. Even a fool, so he be honest and will wait, is ever seen to.’

‘But *your* wife, Grattan? Is she living?’

‘Yes, poor Nelly; she is living, but giving way at last. How brave she has been! My marriage with her—the one thing in my career which worldly men would condemn—is the only thing that I cannot regret. It has been the sight of her that drove me to this last scheme which you have justly denounced as “miserable.” She has been even the pluckier of the two. But of late she has been so pulled down that I could not bear to see her.’

‘Where is she?’

‘Do you remember the cottage where you tried to find me, and where—’

‘Perfectly.’

‘She is there. I took it originally, for a nominal rent, for twenty-one years, which will expire this coming December. I have left it and returned to it, and left it and returned to it again; but in the wreck of all else, the little cottage is all that remains. I have not seen Nelly for the last four days. I could not bear to go and see her till I could take her better news.’

‘Does she know of your visit here?’

‘Not a word, or she would not have let me come. She would have done as much, or worse, I dare say, for me; but she would never have let me do it for her. Poor dear Nelly! She bore it bravely: but she has quite given up the game.’

‘Shall I come and see her?’

‘Will you?’ exclaimed the other ardently.

‘Yes; to-morrow, if I may.’

‘Oh! do! do!’

‘I will. Go to her now. For, indeed, you can take her better news. Depend upon it, she shall

want, no more.' Horncastle was pressing and pressing his hand. 'There, go—go! To-morrow, then. I will be at the cottage some time before noon.'

The window was re-opened, and Horncastle departed. But the walk across the grass was not the elastic walk of yesternight. And when the boat pulled off, the sound of the oars again came back to Mortimer's ears, but not now with the rythmical cadence with which, as he then had listened, the strange visitor had swept away into the silence and the dark.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY the following morning, whilst yet he had not finished dressing, Walter Dyneley received a message from Mrs. Landon that she was going back to her post of tending the sick as soon as ever she could, but that she particularly wished, before she went, to see him for a few moments. He got through the rest of his toilet as rapidly as possible, and rushed off to find her. She was already dressed to go out, and was hurriedly swallowing some coffee especially prepared for her. As yet, no one else was down.

‘I have been as quick as ever I could. I hope I have not kept you waiting?’

‘Not at all. Thanks for your being so expeditious.’

‘Well, and what is it you want me for?’

‘I have no wish, Walter,’ Mrs. Landon said, ‘to intrude upon your confidence, though, indeed, you

can tell me little that I do not know already. But be good enough to believe that if, uninvited, I introduce a subject, the first mention of which would more naturally come from *you*, I do so from the profoundest interest in you and Florence.'

'I am sure of it, Mrs. Landon. Probably, she has told you what occurred yesterday?'

'She has, more or less.'

'Well?'

'What do you intend to do?'

'Nothing, at present. What *can* I do? I have no taste for submitting myself to a second mortification. Yet I cannot persuade myself that she does not love me.'

'You would be very hasty, at any rate, in arriving at such a conclusion.'

'Yet her manner was so cold, her attitude so unyielding, her refusal to answer me so peremptory, that I confess a blunt rejection would scarcely have chafed me more.'

'But, doubtless, she had her reasons.'

'Yes, but reasons that, as far as I could guess at them, were not very satisfactory; since, though they do not support the inference of my warmer moments

that she does not love me at all, at any rate warrant the conclusion of my calmer ones that she will love me only by permission.'

'I do not pretend to be the interpreter of her heart, much less to be her herald. I need scarcely say that she has not the faintest notion that I have sought this interview. But unless I am very much mistaken, you have no right to gather from her behaviour more than her opinion, that the moment of her guardian's return was ill-chosen for the liberation of your long-suppressed affection. Nor can I think that in this opinion she was unreasonable.'

'Then I have nothing to do but to respect that opinion, and wait patiently for a moment more opportune.'

'My dear Walter, quite the reverse ; or I too might have waited, or indeed foregone the possible and scarcely pleasant imputation of being exceeding officious. *I* speak because *you* must—and at once.'

'Again so soon ! Impossible. I cannot, and will not.'

'Then you will never have a chance of speaking

at all. There is not a moment to be lost. Your mother told me, last night, that Mr. Dyneley meditates immediate departure—probably to Italy—with Florence.’

‘You don’t say so! But is my mother’s belief more than a suspicion, and such a one as I can lay before Florence as my excuse for introducing the subject anew, so shortly after she has refused to entertain it?’

‘I tell you that his determination to depart is certain. Now, I must go. I have done my duty. The rest remains with you.’

Florence soon came down. But Mrs. Dyneley also made her appearance at the breakfast-table: Dyneley, as on the preceding day, being absent from a meal to which he had now for years been unaccustomed. After breakfast, Walter sauntered out as usual to smoke his cigar and have a romp with the dogs. On his return to the house, he perceived his mother driving away down the avenue, and found Florence in the library busily at work with her needle. He came up through the window to the back of her chair and leaned over it.

‘What are you doing, Florence?’

‘I am finishing your cigar-case.’

‘How much of it remains to be done?’

‘Only this flower. My part of the work will be finished to-day.’

‘That is fortunate. And you will leave it me as your farewell gift?’

So far he had remained leaning over her chair. She had not moved, but had gone on with her embroidery. Now, she let her fingers rest, turned round, and looked up at him.

‘What do you mean, Walter? It is a gift certainly; but why a parting one?’

‘Because you are about to leave Merestead.’

‘When?’ she asked, in a tone of surprise.

‘Did you not know it?’

‘No: certainly not. But when?’

‘Immediately.’

‘At whose wish? At yours?’

‘Florence!’

She rose hastily, and extended both her hands.

‘Forgive me, Walter! I was unjust. I am sure you have no desire that I should go; much less do I believe that you would instigate my departure. But tell me what is the reason?’

‘Because Mr. Dyneley wishes it. It is his intention : not yet communicated to me directly, but with which I am not the less positively acquainted. Are you sorry?’

‘Can you doubt it? Is it possible for me to be otherwise? For nearly eight years I have lived in this spot as though it existed but for me. Both Mrs. Dyneley and Mrs. Landon have treated me with maternal fondness ; and from you I have experienced an undeviating kindness that I am as unable to express as to repay.’ Her eyes swam with tears. ‘I know every tree : I love every nook. Sorry ! Indeed, I am distressed.’

He took her hand.

‘I was not acquainted with this yesterday, or I might have pleaded it in justification of a course which you seemed to think and were perhaps right in thinking needed to be justified. A word—a look—from you will prevent my recurring now to the subject.’ She did not withdraw her hand, and she did lift her eyes. ‘But it seems to me that the sudden change of circumstances permits me again, though so soon, to reopen it. You are silent. You do not forbid me? Recall then, I pray you, all

my words of yesterday. Believe them to be but half of the fond and faithful truth; and tell me, Florence! do you love me?’

‘O yes! Walter! from my heart.’

And tenderly pressed to his, upon it we will leave her. But we may be sure that they were not long before they sought the atmosphere dearest to the young votaries of love, the atmosphere of summer skies and sheltering leafage.

On Dyneley coming down and inquiring if he could see Isabelle, he was informed that she had already gone out. She was in the pony carriage, but had not left word where she was going, or when she would be back. So he took his hat and stick, and at once started for Horncastle’s cottage.

He had some little difficulty in determining even its direction. Nor was it till at last he found himself near to a bench beneath some limes, that his perplexity was finally removed. One-and-twenty years had gone since last he halted on that spot. His own quick walk to catch the train, the figure that had risen from the seat as he had approached but had been otherwise unnoticed till the audible start forced him to turn and gaze upon the beautiful

vision of his boyhood, his very words hard at first but ever softening, her sweet tones of sad explanation, the gathering gloom, the tonitrant warning, the quickening flashes, the rain, the rush—all, all came back upon him, as vividly as if no years had intervened. It was not wise to linger in spot so dangerously dear.

At last he arrived at the cottage. It looked just the same as ever; desolate and uncared for. But there was not even a bell, now; and the gate yielded to his hand. Neither on the house door was there bell or knocker. He opened it and entered, and then turned out of the little passage into the room where he had gathered the mignonette, and whither in the storm he had returned with Isabelle.

Great Heavens! *Had* no years intervened? For assuredly here once more she stood, and as then, tearful and troubled. But the sight of her banished from his mind all but his strange interview of the bygone night. Low he bowed before her, exclaiming with tremulous weakness, 'Isabelle! forgive me!'

'Forgive you, Mortimer! O yes! as fervently as I pray to be forgiven. Where could we own our

need of pardon better than here, where Providence has strangely, but I doubt not designedly, sent us? And whatever may have been our sorrows, let us not rail. They who begin by thinking themselves the most miserable, are in danger of ending by thinking themselves the most virtuous of mankind. Better for us all—if such be possible—to overestimate our guilt than our misfortunes, and so beseech from Heaven forgiveness rather than compensation.'

'I know it, Isabelle, I know it: though I shall more clearly hold and cherish the conviction forced on me by my career, now that I hear it pronounced by your holier lips. But let the importunities of one who, as he says and as you know, was the companion of my youth, trouble you no more . . . But tell me: what brings you here?'

'I came to join Mrs. Landon in attending on the poor woman of whom you heard us speak the other night.'

'She must be Grattan's wife.'

'Yes, she is. I have learned that, only this morning. *He* was not here before, when we came to see her.'

‘Is he here now? He expects me.’

‘Yes. He and Mrs. Landon are with the poor creature. I fear she is dying.’

‘He told *me* of her for the first time last night; and I promised to come and see her at once.’

‘So he informed me. I therefore was expecting you, and heard you coming. I have only just left them Have you seen Florence, this morning?’

‘No, I have not’ He paused a moment, and then burst out: ‘O Isabelle! how could you doubt she was my child? or think that, had I not been bound by fresh solemn ties, I could have obstinately remained away from your side, when the *original* reasons for so remaining were removed? It is the most melancholy of stories; but I must tell it you now. When a prey to very conflicting passion, I tore myself away from you and my country—I thought, for ever—I settled down, as you know, in Caen. The reasons for my choice were, that it cost me little to go and little to remain there. Its proximity to England also enabled me to keep up communication with those from whom alone I could obtain the means of live-

lihood. I wrote; but I had been brought up as little to literature as to anything else; and though people seem now to entertain a different opinion, I suspect that, as it is the most difficult of pursuits, so for true efficiency in its exercise is required the most severe and methodical of apprenticeships. No wonder, then, that at first my attempts were not very meritorious, nor my gains very extensive. But the honest people among whom I had taken up my abode did not seem to think that the enjoyment of life is increased by rivalry in pretences; and I did not require well-furnished rooms or a brocaded coat to obtain their hospitable regard. But—truth to tell—I fear I repaid their simple, ready welcome with but little show of sociability. And, with the exception of a broken-down French officer, I did not form one genuine acquaintance. I need scarcely say that he was poor, or he would not have been where he was. But he was a high-minded gentleman, and one of those tender-hearted cynics, whom the stream of life flings out of its sweep, whose lips disappointment makes slightly sardonic, but the beautiful mercy of whose hearts it is powerless to disturb.’

‘ But he was not alone ? ’

‘ No. Besides being poor, he was an invalid, but was divinely nursed by a daughter. She was very simple, but very sweet; and I very shortly gave her what, as yet, was all I had to give — kindness and friendship. Her father was never so happy as when he and I were talking; and in his society I learned again to talk and listen. Months passed, during which we were constantly together. But he grew rapidly worse. I helped her to nurse him; but he died. I helped her to bury him — and we were betrothed over his grave.’

‘ And you married her ? ’

‘ I married her, and at once. She had not what could really be called a relation in the world. If she was to stand in any relation to me, it could be now only as wife; and the utter loneliness of each seemed to point to the destiny of both. Besides, Isabelle, there was your letter, your precious, beautiful letter, to second the finger of Fate, and to solve all my doubts. In it you had urged upon me, with all the fervour of your soul you said, to accept whatever opportunity of domestic love and comfort the future might have in store for me. I

believed—I cannot but still believe—that Marian ardently loved me. My wounds were too fresh, and my perplexities too absorbing, for me to bring much of any of love's enthusiasm to the union. But whatever I brought, I brought with a loyal heart, and without one single glance backwards at the past. She was so sweet, so helpless, so tender, that day by day I felt drawn nearer and nearer to her, even whilst I fear she thought I was moving farther and farther away.'

‘ Did she know your history ? ’

‘ She did, from her father, to whom I myself had told it. It had been better had she been altogether ignorant of it. For her young, unsophisticated love unfortunately manifested itself in jealousy; and in that finest form of jealousy which it is impossible to grapple with, and therefore to eradicate. I see now what was hidden from me then; that the disappointments, troubles, and complete disorganization of hopes, through which I had passed, had made me strange, fitful, absent, and uncertain; but she misconstrued my words, and could attribute them only to my living in the past rather than with her in the present. In that I think she wronged me; but the

wrong was half natural, and wholly pardonable. Such hold had the idea taken of her mind, that she averred the only thing which could remove it, would be to know you.'

'That was very natural, though perhaps, for a man, not so easy to understand.'

'I understand it now; but even had I understood it then, I could not have granted her request.'

'No, indeed.'

'I hoped, however, that the notion would leave her, and that things would be better, when a new tie—the birth of a child by both ardently expected—should help to bind us. About a month before the time at which we looked for this yearned-for event, I was summoned to England. On my return I found her a mother, and Florence in the cradle. But somehow her vague jealousy, instead of abating, now only increased. I bore it as best I could, and saw no means of getting rid of it, but by moving farther away from the scenes of my past, and into a land whose novelty, to say nothing of the world of varied interest which it contains, would wean her from her phantasy. Encouraged by the success and remuneration which my pen had brought me, I

resolved to depart in the spring for Italy. At the very moment when I had finally determined on carrying out this idea, the most opportune of offers was made to me, the offer of being correspondent in Italy itself to an English newspaper. This offer you already know I accepted; but you do not know with what joyous alacrity I accepted it, nor with what wings of impatience I flew back from London to my wife and child, to bear them both along with me to the beloved land, with my love for which you are intimately acquainted. Nor do you know what I tell you now, that I returned to Caen to find Florence in the cradle, but not the watching eye of the mother.'

‘Your wife was dead!’

‘Not dead, Isabelle. Worse than dead, if such could be. She had disappeared, leaving behind her our babe, and a note imploring me not to attempt to pursue her. Jealousy, so long indulged in, had wrought her up to madness, and she had abandoned me. She was provided for, and I knew it. I felt indignant; I felt outraged. I could see only my wrongs and Florence. I was blind to everything else. I snatched my little one from the cradle,

and carried her across the mountains. When Time had induced calmer judgments and tenderer sensations, and little Floy's rapidly budding form and face seemed to reproach me with the absence of a mother, I sought for my wife—patiently and earnestly. Search, inquiry, and patience were then alike in vain. Then, when I could no longer point to a wife or get a register of her death, I thought it best, for Florence's own sake, to call her my adopted daughter. Oh! how we blunder in thinking to be wise! The first difficulty is ever the easiest; and the more we haggle with truth, the more exacting he becomes. But my wife, my wife! That I have learned to bow to the arrangements of Heaven, I think my later life demonstrates. But as long as it sees fit to withhold her or intelligence of her from me, so long does it leave me but an exile upon earth. O Isabelle! You know that I would shed for you every drop of blood in my veins. But *I* know that, despite all the past, you would spurn me from your side, if you were not sure that I still remain, even in thought, faithful to her whom I married. I may see her no more on earth; but I cannot yield up the hope that some-

where the veil will be lifted, and she will see into the heart which hungered for years, and still sorrowfully hungers, to prove that she had no right to doubt it. Now could I give her all the calm and sheltering love which her intense though quiet nature yearned for and missed. Now could I make her amends ; and now, it is too late. I have only her child to console me ; and even she seems not destined to be an unalloyed consolation. It is something to feel that, so far, she has been such to *you*. She never shall be the opposite. I must remove her from Merestead at once.'

'So, Mortimer Dyneley,' said a voice, at sound of which he turned, and beheld a woman veiled, and standing in the door-way. 'So, you really think that the little slumberer you woke at Caen, and carried off with you to Italy, was your daughter ! O men ! men ! supremely confident of your science, you rush through the universe, flaunting as the insignia of your conquests the secrets of the spheres. Perhaps you are the victors you seem. But this at least, is beyond dispute : you have not mastered the very alphabet which alone will enable you to read woman's heart. The woman whom you married

may have abandoned *you*, but she never would have abandoned her babe.'

'But it lay slumbering in the cradle, and she assuredly had gone.'

'The very proof that it was nor hers, nor yours. Your little expected one never saw the light. She who had counted upon its coming as the Heaven-provided link to bind you more closely to her, and as an advocate that would obtain for her the concession she could not wring from you by her own entreaties, saw in its doom the final burial of her hopes. Yet madly jealous to preserve a love which she foolishly feared was never strong and was but daily growing weaker, and unwisely tempted to believe that she could yet by a deception obtain what she never ought to have desired, substituted Florence in its place. You remember Mrs. Dalton?'

'I do. You are not—?'

'No—no: I am not Mrs. Dalton. But *she* was Florence's mother; and it was she who suggested the deception. Your wife, in her wild despair, clutched at the offer, which ended only in aggravating her woe, and did nothing towards forwarding her then ineradicable desire. She plunged

from your side, and, indeed, for a time from the world, hiding, if not suppressing, her griefs, in a French House of Contemplative Religious. There she met not only with the tenderest treatment, but with the most healthy counsel. There she learned to recognize and bewail her error—indeed, her sin; and to avow that jealousy arises, not, as is vulgarly supposed, from too much love, but from too little; to make full allowance for the manifold perplexities of her husband's life; to yearn to fall at his feet, and be lifted up from them again upon his heart.'

'You madden me with your words,' he exclaimed. 'Can you prove them? Who is it that addresses me?'

'Mrs. Landon,' said Isabelle, quietly.

'I *can* prove them,' said the other, disregarding the question which Mrs. Dyneley had answered; 'but if I *do* prove them, will you give, what you are this day sure to be asked—your consent to the union of Walter and Florence?'

'I will; cheerfully, gladly. I would give everything on earth.'

'See then my proof!' she answered, raising her veil, and advancing towards him.

‘Marian? My wife!’

‘Yes, Mortimer! your wife!’

She was prostrate at his feet, sobbing and clutching at his knees. Wildly he seized her in his arms and dragged her up till she rested on his convulsed but satisfied breast.

‘Am I quite—quite forgiven?’

‘Marian! Marian! Can you doubt it?’

‘And do *you* forgive me?’ she said, turning in tears to Mrs. Dyneley.

‘I, dear? I have nothing to forgive. But did you know, all these years, who I was, and who Florence was? You *must* have known.’

‘Yes: and my knowledge was the very reason for my obtaining, in reply to your advertisement, an engagement as Florence’s companion. So was I enabled to watch over her, and—by a means once little dreamed of—to be near you, though not with Mortimer.’

‘But why did you not confide in me long ago? Do you think I would not have brought him home from the East and back to your arms as soon as ever I knew the truth?’

‘Ah! Isabelle! I felt I was not worthy. I

knew he would return to Florence in Heaven's own good time ; and that then he would find me at her side, and, what I trust I shall prove myself now, tutored by long separation better to appreciate the value of his presence.'

He pressed her close to his heart.

'And you are not jealous of me, now?' asked Isabelle.

She tore herself even from her husband's embrace, and flung herself into Isabelle's arms.

'Yes: I *am* jealous: but only of your angelic goodness. I have long ceased to be jealous of anything else.'

'But tell me, Marian!' said Dyneley, whose side again she sought. 'Tell me—if you can, at least—where is Florence's mother? where is Mrs. Dalton?'

'Here, Mortimer!' said Horncastle, who had entered. 'Here in this little cottage, where you gaze also upon—me—Florence's father.'

'Mrs. Dalton was your wife—was Nelly!'

'Yes, Mortimer!' answered Marian; 'she was: though *I* was not aware of *that*, till I came to nurse her here. But I knew her at once,

though she is too weak and ill to have recognized me.'

'And Florence is *your* daughter and Nelly's!'
said Dyneley, turning to Horncastle.

'Yes: my daughter and Nelly's. You have already, Mortimer, forgiven so much wrong, that it would be idle for you to refuse to extend pardon to all. Yet perhaps in what I tell you now, I may claim to have tried to make you *some* compensation. You remember our meeting at Hâvre. Remembering that, you will but too readily perceive that I must have been privy to the deception—though your wife, as she says, never saw me, and was as ignorant as yourself who Mrs. Dalton really was. Nelly and I did it, as we did everything else, for the purpose of bringing you back to public life, and so saving ourselves from ruin. But when the scheme broke down, and my wife and I learned that you had gone away with Florence (and, as we supposed, with your wife also), I refused—I declare, out of pure penitence and love for you—to allow even my own child to be snatched from your arms. I would not consent to be so cruel as to undeceive you. I felt that we had wronged you terribly, that Florence

would be to you an infinite consolation, and that she would have with you what we—her parents—should now never be able to give her—a beautiful childhood, an accomplished youth, and a favourable future. Poor Nelly! How difficult it was to force her to submit. Rightly or wrongly, for good or ill, the deeper our misery, the more she wanted her child. She is crying for her now—even now, while she is, I fear, going to be torn by death from me for ever.

‘Let us go to her, Marian! Isabelle, you will come?’

They went. There on a bed, unquestionably of death, lay poor brave Nelly Horncastle. Dyneley sate by the side of it, and took her hand. She thought it was the doctor, but she still went on moaning.

‘I want my child! Grattan, I want to see my child.’

‘You shall see her,’ said Dyneley.

She looked up wildly.

‘Who says I shall see her? How can I see her? *He* has got her. Where is she! Grattan! Grattan! I want my child.’

‘ You do not remember me. Have you forgotten Mortimer Dyneley ? ’

‘ Forgotten Mortimer Dyneley ! Forgot — *He* has my child, Grattan ! He—has—O my child ! my child ! ’

But her words were only the ultimate wild utterances of the nightmare of life, from which, ere the Mayday sun had swung round to the south, she suddenly awoke :—let us hope, to the Light of the Morning !

.

Despite the altered wishes of Dyneley, who was now most willing that Horncastle should pass his remaining days in peace, Grattan insisted on obeying his friend's first injunctions, so solemnly given on the strange night of their reunion. Praying that his history and her parentage might be concealed from Florence, he rushed off to join in the final resistance of the Polish insurrection. The blood of the martyr, he said, was never spilled in vain : and Liberty was the only living religion to which man can any longer bear testimony by his death. He perished : doubtless, as Mortimer had enjoined, striking well and dying hard.

Walter and Florence are betrothed, though the former is still at College. Should they, as is probable, be married, and their marriage, as we may trust, be blessed with offspring, the end of the nineteenth century stands a chance of witnessing in one, who will unite the blood of Mortimer Dyneley with that of Grattan Horncastle—the spectacle of a highly-gifted and admirably-balanced man.

But what will be the future career of Mortimer Dyneley? At present he is travelling with Marian, Isabelle, and Florence. When he will return, I know not; but that he will return, I am not permitted to doubt. I, who have tried to trace the events of his youth, and to show him re-appearing in the fullness of his manhood, permit myself at times to call up visions of the riper career that is to come. I know that he has for ever abandoned all thought of being useful in the atmosphere of Art; seeing clearly, as he does, that the influence of woman, which has invaded the sphere of manners only to improve them, has invaded the sphere of Art to be the occasion of that final paralysis, for which profoundly operating causes, already insisted on by him, had long prepared it. But in what direction his yet

abundant energies are to be manifested, I am somewhat perplexed to foretell. Sometimes I think I see him the secluded sage of his century, dispensing the calm counsels of a multifarious experience. Sometimes I think I hear his voice amidst the silence of a Senate, urging the imperilled claims of an admonishing minority, and reminding a reluctant, but withal attentive assembly, that majorities have rarely come to believe anything until it has ceased to be true. Sometimes I fancy I follow the Apostle of a new Creed, that will harmonize with a note, never struck before, the unhappy discords of a thousand sects. Sometimes I think I behold him as the chosen Rebel of a fresh and surely-approaching religious insurrection, the braying of whose challenging trumpets may even now be caught by the acute, and whose banners are to the far-seeing and the faithful already coming up over the horizon. Anon, I fear I see him, blind-stricken by accumulated doubts, worn out with mental wandering, sick with the soul's suspense, able no longer to suffer or to soar, madly rushing for shelter to the tolerant refuge of monastic peace. /s

No—no ! Such weakness will never be his. He

will not shrink like a craven from the allotted and necessary struggle. He will return and be amongst us : amongst us, even if unknown. Success, indeed, he does not disesteem, since one of the sagest of mankind has declared that fame is the wise man's means. But mere applause is the pittance of the showman and the attitudinarian, and he will not begrudge them their peculiar reward. For himself, he is content to have remarked in his loiterings by many seas, that every wave, whatever wealth a distributing Providence decides shall be borne in its individual bosom, retires undistinguished into the community of waters, when it has cast its corals on the shore.

THE END.

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